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ASPEN COURT.

BY

SHIRLEY BROOKS.



LONDON
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N^o. VII.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

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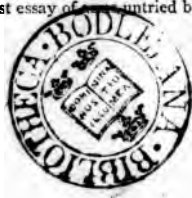
A STORY OF OUR OWN TIME.

BY

SHIRLEY BROOKS,

AUTHOR OF "THE GORDIAN KNOT," "SOONER OR LATER," ETC.

"The first essay of a new country tried before."—*Dryden*.



LONDON :

BRADBURY, EVANS, & CO., 11, BOUVERIE ST.

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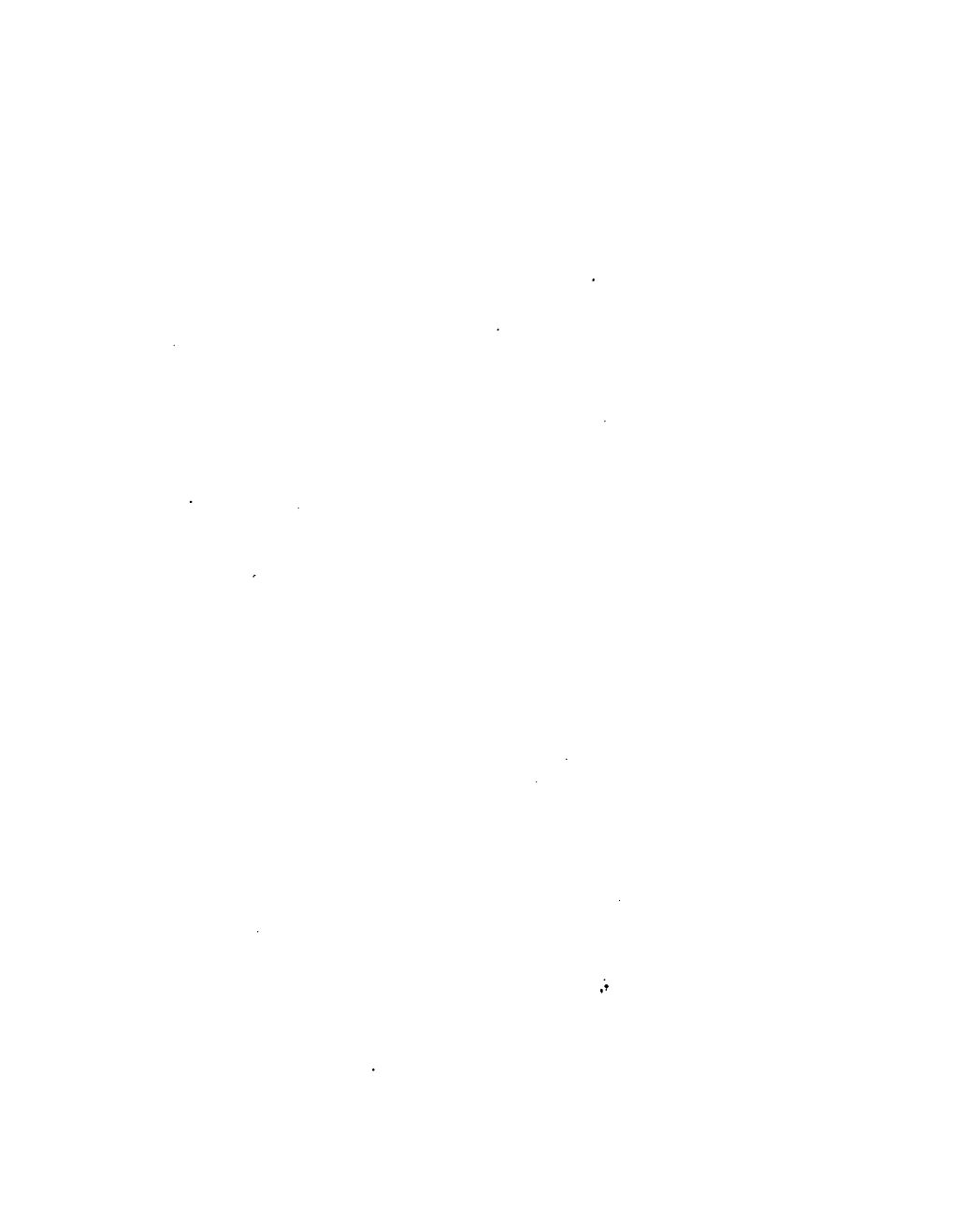
DEDICATED TO

CHARLES DICKENS,

“IN EARNEST ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF THE CONSTANT, ENERGETIC,
AND INVALUABLE SERVICE RENDERED BY HIM IN PRO-
MOTING THE RECOGNITION AND ELEVATION
OF THE PROFESSION ADORNED
BY HIS GENIUS.”

AFTER MANY YEARS, THE AUTHOR HAS THE GRATIFICATION
OF CORDIALLY RENEWING THAT INSCRIPTION, AND OF ADDING
THAT HE PREFIXES TO HIS REVISED BOOK THE NAME OF A
MUCH! HONOURED FRIEND.

REGENT'S PARK,
March, 1869.



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ASPEN COURT;

A STORY OF OUR OWN TIME.

CHAPTER I.

LIVING IN ONE'S FRIENDS' RECOLLECTIONS.



THE clock at St. James' palace has struck eight, and many gentlemen who design to dine at the Lycurgus Club, are studying the *carte*, performing, meanwhile, that curious series of grimaces and frowns with which an Englishman helps himself to invent his dinner. The cabs and broughams have been arriving rather thickly during the last quarter of an hour, from which it is gathered that the dinner-bell is on its honourable legs in the House of Commons.

"Who's up, Ambergate?" inquires an exceedingly handsome young gentleman in black, with an inconceivably faultless white cravat, of another young gentleman of similarly irreproachable appearance, who has just come in, and looks round with an expression of hopeless, yet manly despair, at finding all his favourite seats occupied.

"Philip Bobus is speaking, Freddy Belt," replies Lord Ambergate, "and likely to speak. And have you ordered your dinner, Freddy Belt? I'll dine with you. What have you ordered? But I don't care. Waiter, I will have whatever Sir Frederic has ordered. Here comes Acton Calveley. Bobus, of course, Acton?"

"Good for an hour and a half, at least. He has several

hundred-weight of papers with him. You two fellows can't have dined ; I saw Ambergate in the House half an hour ago.

"No, you come here. Belt has ordered my dinner, let him order yours."

"I don't care. Very well, Palestine soup, Belt? That's the only thing on my mind."

"Be relieved, then, for here it is."

"Divide to-night?" asked Sir Frederic Belt.

"Well, Whipham was mysterious, and didn't want me to go away. He mumbled something about somebody being unwell," said Lord Ambergate.

"Here's Tom Crowsfoot—how well the fellow wears! Bobus, Crowsfoot?"

"The Bobus! You may be interested in hearing that he has reached his fifth orange. William Lyndon has bet me that Bobus makes up the dozen."

"A quarter to nine," said Ambergate, thoughtfully. "No, he won't. I'll go halves with you, Tom, if you like."

"There's a good lot of colonies, here and there," said Freddy Belt, "and it's the colonies he's on, isn't it?"

"Well, yes," replied Lord Ambergate; "at least sugar, and refining in bond, whatever that is, and differential duties—I know I heard something about them—and tonnage, which I suppose is some other colonial production."

"I've something to say to you, Ambergate," said Tom Crowsfoot. "All for your good. What do you let yourself be seen speaking to a lawyer for, in a public thoroughfare?"

"Lawyer, lawyer!" replied Ambergate, musingly; "I don't know what you mean. Let's see. I met Kingsilver the other day, and congratulated him on being made a judge—do you mean that?"

"No," said Tom, "I never heard anybody call *him* a lawyer. This was to-day, in Bond Street; I saw you myself."

"O, by Jove!" said Lord Ambergate, sitting upright, and speaking so loud, that several men looked up from their dinners; "I'm devilish glad you mentioned that. I want to tell you something, and it deeply concerns your interest, Acton Calveley."

"How good of you to think of it at last, then!" said Calveley.

"Ah! don't talk in that way," replied Ambergate; "you know what a beast of a memory mine is. But, I say, this is a fact, mind. Henry Wilmslow's all right again."

"Henry Wilmslow!"

"Henry Wilmslow!"

So exclaimed together, Calveley and Sir Frederic. Tom Crowsfoot, being an older man, made no further demonstration than that of opening his bright black eyes a little wider than usual, and slightly compressing his thin lips. Perhaps Tom did not believe in the possibility of anybody ever being quite all right. He knew that he had never been so during thirty-five years upon town, though one fortune to start with, one by marriage, and one by legacy, had not been bad material to work with.

"All right," persisted Lord Ambergate; "and the lawyer Tom speaks of was Penkridge, partner to a great rich attorney, called Molesworth, of whom you may have heard."

"I have," said Tom Crowsfoot, quietly. Perhaps he had, Molesworth having had occasion to outlaw Tom, at the suit of a leash of jewellers, in days when Tom was younger, and liked to see his presents glitter behind the footlights.

"Well, you all remember Wilmslow, I fancy, though he is years older than any of us. He used to come here, sometimes, about the time when I was elected, but I believe it was a little risky, and that if a card was brought up to him, he fidgetted, and seldom stayed long—you know the symptoms—came on Sundays, too, which is sometimes a greater proof of a man's invisibility than your never seeing him. Finally, he vanished, and his name has got out of our list, *pour cause*."

"He married Jane Tracy," said Tom, "but that was when he was in the Guards. Deuced handsome fellow then—a little too row-de-dow for my taste—but showy, and plenty to say, such as it was. In fact, I don't know that Wilmslow wasn't about as pleasant a fellow as a noisy officer in debt can be."

"Not a bad match, that Tracy girl, at least for him," said Frederic Belt; "for he was up to his ears then, and she had fifteen hundred a-year. And I think there was something about a claim to a large estate in Gloucestershire, or somewhere, which, I suppose, however, was all moonshine."

"Just what it wasn't, Freddy Belt, and what I'm coming to.

Jane Tracy was heiress to this very estate, supposing her claim was valid. It slept a long time, but at last Molesworth, this lawyer, took it up in earnest. It seems he has a way of succeeding in things."

"Rather a useful faculty, I should say, in a lawyer," said Calveley, "and not bad for anybody to have."

"Well, Molesworth has been prosecuting this claim of Jane Tracy's, and with his usual luck. The estate, which is that of Aspen Court, in the best part of Gloucestershire, is worth five thousand a-year, and the law has given it to our friend, Mr. Henry Wilmslow."

"He'll soon run through it," said Tom, composedly; "I see how it will melt away in his hands."

"Why," said Sir Frederic, "you know Wilmslow's had a lesson. I suppose he's a sort of ass, but he must be over fifty, and has been awfully hard up, which, at that time of life, is the deuce. Then he has a wife and some children, not that *they* would make much difference in his going on, perhaps, unless he were personally worried. But I should say the chances are, that he will clear off a bit, and save and be selfish in the country. He will, if he isn't a blockhead."

"He let me in about some infernal insurances," said Acton Calveley. "I was just of age, and he talked me over, and so I became one of his securities."

"It doesn't say much for the electors of Wobblebridge that they have chosen a man who, at any period of life, could be talked into anything by Henry Wilmslow," said Tom Crowsfoot; "but that won't do, Wilmslow talked to somebody who was prettier than you."

Acton Calveley coloured a little, and drank a glass of claret.

"I was a great fool," he said, frankly, "but I have paid for my folly. I wonder whether I shall get anything out of him now."

"See an attorney, and be quick," said Freddy Belt. "If you come down upon him at the moment of his good fortune, you may snatch something. I say, isn't it odd no fellow comes in from the House? Waiter, bring the paper."

"We shall hear soon enough," said Ambergate. "Whipham would send, of course, if necessary. Have some more claret."

"*Perhaps, now Wilmslow's up again, he'll stand for some-*

where in Gloucestershire," said Sir Frederic ; " it would be just like him. I knew Jane Tracy a little, and rather pitied her than not, when I heard she was to have him."

" We know a bad husband or two, I take it," said Tom Crowsfoot smiling.

" There are such persons, I am told," said Frederic Belt, who had been divorced himself, and the cause of divorce in others ; " but you will find that it is usually the wife's fault."

This was unanimously assented to ; Tom Crowsfoot, who, as a gentleman, really wished to do justice, appending to his verdict,—

" That is to say, you know, that it is her fault somehow or other."

" As regards poor Mrs. Tracy," said Acton Calveley, " though of course we should find it was her fault if we went to the bottom of the business,—for, as the sultan remarked in the Eastern tale—"

" Please, Calveley," said Lord Ambergate, deprecatingly. " there will be a new edition of ' Puffs from the Narghilè,' in which you can use all those stories without annoying friends who do not read your works."

" I was going to say," continued Acton, unperturbed, " that, though Mrs. Tracy's faults doubtless were the cause of Wilmslow's being a donkey, and extravagant, and faithless, and so forth, the woman has managed to keep them very secret, for she appeared to me the most patient, affectionate, allowance-making creature I ever saw ; and I believe her to be so."

" One never knows what to believe in this world," said Tom Crowsfoot.

" Jane Wilmslow has had a hard time of it with the precious Henry," said Acton. " And though I should perhaps lose by it, I should not mind hearing that the estate comes to her for her separate use, and that he can't touch a shilling of the rents. How's that, Ambergate ?"

" I don't think it's quite that, but Penkridge said something about Molesworth having made Henry Wilmslow sign some deeds or settlements, and so managing that he cannot proceed to instant duckery-and-drakery. I say, here's Jimmy Vulture with an opera-glass ; see how he is glaring round the room. We're wanted, I believe. Here, waiter, ask Mr. Vulture if he is

looking for us. What is it, Vulture James?" he said, as a remarkably ugly little man, with a bald-head, fringed all round with yellow hair, hurried up to the table.

"Come down at once," he said in a fierce whisper. "There's the deuce and all to pay. Whipham's tearing his hair!"

"Well, he has not got much, so that amusement won't last him long," said Calveley. "But what's on? Is Bobus down?"

"An hour ago and more; but come on," said Mr. Vulture, nervously, "I've undertaken to bring you."

"But did you happen to count how many oranges Bobus had sucked?" said Tom Crowsfoot, making ready, however, to be off. A practical man that Tom Crowsfoot.

"Come, Lord Ambergate, there's a good fellow," pleaded Vulture; "Sir Frederic, pray make haste!"

"My dear Vulture," said Freddy Belt, "*we* are not promised places if we help Whipham well through this session."

"But if you think I am to have one, it would be good-natured to help *me*," said Mr. Vulture, obliged to bring out his private hopes as an argument with the loungers.

"Nay, if you make it a personal thing, Vulture James, we'll save the colonies and the country to oblige you. But you won't say what has happened?"

"Bobus was taken ill, and obliged to stop. Lord Malachite got up to answer him, but broke down; and those fellows are whipping, and though M'Dangle has promised to do his best, I don't suppose they'll hear him, he's such a bore. You see everybody's away, as no one is expected to care about those cursed colonies enough to sit out a debate."

"No, that's true enough," said Lord Ambergate. "Colonies are a great mistake, to my mind. However, we must go. Calveley, I'll take you down, if you like."

It is satisfactory to know that they arrived in time for the division, and that the claims of her Majesty's colonies were, once more, indefinitely postponed. Bobus was beaten, thanks to the lawgivers of the Lycurgus.

CHAPTER II.

ASPEN COURT.



THE old house in Gloucestershire has no particular beauty to recommend it to you at first sight. It stands half way up a gentle elevation, is surrounded by woods as old as itself,—for the Dryads of Aspen have as yet never shuddered at the sound of dice,—and it is of no exclusive style of architecture, though the Elizabethan is predominant. The fact is that the owners of Aspen Court, for the time being, have made such alterations as they deemed desirable for safety or comfort, with the boldest disregard for keeping and *coup-d'œil*. And therefore, though a very good idea of the general character of the house may be imparted in a few words, nothing save tinted plans and figured references could guide a stranger through the labyrinth of rooms which one owner has thrust out, and another has piled up, and a third has hung on, wherever it has seemed convenient, during a couple of hundred years and upwards, to make such supposed improvements. But if you will be good enough to imagine an exceedingly long red brick front, with a monstrous door in the centre, protected by a portico, and will draw along this front two lines of windows, originally uniform, but now varying from the modern French double window, to the simple old diamond lattice with its hazy glass, and including in their motley ranks those huge ugly square staring sashes, with twenty-four square panes, which you see in the cuts to story-books of Queen Anne's time—the dapper windows of ordinary suburban architecture—and, quite at the east end, two openings with only a couple of very large panes in each, the latest improvement of all,—you will have a tolerably accurate notion of the front of Aspen Court. There are but two regular stories, but, above the front, there rises a mountainous mass of tiles, beneath which are innumerable attics, and though in that red waste you scarcely notice the loopholes which light these chambers, yet, when sunlight falls athwart the house, the tiny glasses sparkle out, and the roof becomes the feature of the edifice. Tall chimneys and short ones, with variations of sturdy stacks, and even of

pert pipes, garnish this mountain, and, in short, an eye which by instinct loves regularity, or has been trained to look for style, is teased as mercilessly at Aspen Court as at any place I have ever seen.

Behind this front, and running from it at right angles, are two rows of buildings, even more irregular in point of architecture, but keeping their lines tolerably straight. That on the west side is chiefly composed of stables and other offices, over which are apartments for servants, store-houses, and lumber-rooms. The line to the east side is of a better character; there is a series of good, but prim-looking rooms on the ground-floor, and on that above it are some more pleasant and more modern apartments, with Venetian blinds, and balconies for flowers outside the windows. Part of this range of building is quite modern, and has been whitened, and some rustic work and a verandah have been introduced, and there is a chintzy, cottagy look about this portion, in spite of its being set in the midst of red brick and stiff style. The ground thus enclosed on three sides is really a great grass plot, but is so thick with trees, and is so studded with flower mounds, and rustic-workcases full of scarlet geraniums, that we see but little of the green, except just round a clear quiet pool in the centre, with water-lilies and gold-fishes. Three or four classical statues, erected in the age when men stuck up Latin inscriptions in their arbours, and talked about their Muse when they made rhymes, are still standing among the trees, but have been somewhat damaged, from having been used as targets by schoolboy marksmen, whose pistol fingers have long been straightened for ever. This grass-garden is sheltered from observation by the inhabitants on the domestic side, by a very lofty trellis, covered with rich creepers of various kinds, which indeed have formed so massive a screen that additional bulwarks have been necessary to prop it up, and it sometimes waves in the wind like a gigantic Indian fan. A tall thick hedge completes the quadrangle, but a gap seems to have been sliced through it, and, passing on, we find the garden continued up the gentle slope, and terminated by a cluster of old trees which crown the height.

But there is one feature more, which we must not forget to notice, though the foliage encloses it so completely that it might almost escape a careless observer. Turn round, now that we

have reached the limit of the garden, and at the east end of the house, and now of course to your left hand, you will make out a low, white spire. That is the church of Aspen; it is attached to the house, through which its owners have a private entrance to the little aisle. The church has been unimproved amid all the improvements of the mansion, none of whose owners have reproached themselves, like the Hebrew king, that while they had a house of cedar, the ark dwelt in tents. It is a quiet, little, rude old edifice, round which the moss has clung with an affection time has but increased, and the almost shapeless interior, disfigured by undertakers' hatchments, and by sprawling texts from the Proverbs, is not without a solemnity, to which the obscurity, caused by the over-topping woods around, contributes much. Few rays of sunshine fall upon the rough pavement of Aspen Church, or aid the eye to decipher the last memorials of the Tracys of Aspen Court. Many of these are buried here, and there is one tomb, of old date, which seems strangely costly, with its kneeling rows of figures, and its gilded legend, for its place in this remote nook. Later monuments are also here, but chiefly mural, one of them bearing a long Latin inscription to the memory of the man who erected the undressed statues, and is full of sibilant superlatives, which seem to hiss at the adulation they record. We have also an urn, and a plump but desponding Virtue hugging it, the particular Tracy whose ashes, after his body had been burnt (as usual in England), are supposed to have been placed within, having been one of the patriots whom Walpole did not find unpurchasable, and the profits of whose sinecure added many acres to the Aspen Court territory. The last in date is a neat tablet from Regent Street, and came down in a box by the Bristol mail.

Every respectable old family house is haunted. I suppose it would be common-place to present this fact in a different form, and say that few old families are so happy as to escape, for a long series of years, that guilt, or the imputation of that guilt, which generates superstitious terror among their dependents. Assuredly the Aspen Court family is not one of the exceptions. There is a little ghost in the family, and one in which I do not know whether to believe or not. The rustics at Aspen, the small village which lies about half a mile from the house, have a very painful story about this spectre. They allege that a poor

little child, who was wilfully and systematically terrified into idiotcy, and who died in one of the paroxysms of agony produced by a hideous figure which its guardian brought to the foot of its bed in the dead of night, may be seen, at the same hour, leaping about the church in which that wicked woman's last bed is made, and mopping and mowing beside the grave in the hope of repaying its own torments in life. And for the first portion of this frightful story I fear there is too much foundation.

So much for the general aspect of Aspen Court. With the interior, so far as it is possible to understand it, we shall become acquainted as we go on. But the great hall of the mansion must be mentioned at once. We saw the portico, through which we reach the great door of the house. Throw that door open, and you are at one side of an enormous chamber, extending right and left of you. At the extreme end are a few stone steps leading up to the doors of other apartments. Opposite you is a huge chimney-mouth, with its ancient fire-dogs, and with massive carving above and at its sides. The hall is very lofty, and on the side opposite the windows are numerous family portraits, of several generations. There are also portraits at the ends of the chamber, on each side of the smaller doors. Above, and all round, hang armour and weapons, as pikes, carabines, and swords, which have done their work in their time. They were nailed up here soon after Naseby. A young lord of Aspen was there, and they brought him home to die of a pistol-shot fired by a dying Ironside whom he had cut down in the fight. His mother caused all her tenantry to fix up their arms here on the day of his funeral, saying, with a calm sorrow, that "Aspen had done enough." The large red curtain, at the opposite corner, and on your right, covers an arched opening, which leads to the other parts of the house. Near that curtain is an aged clock, of singular elaboration. It is French, and very old, and having once ceased to perform its work, there was no hope for it, for not in Gloucestershire, and perhaps not in London itself, was there a mechanic who could deal with those mystic arrangements. The mere hour of the day the machine told, but haughtily, and at a corner, as if such a trumpery piece of information were beneath its learned dignity. But it told much deeper things. The age of Luna, and her aspect to Sol, *and that same Sol's own aspect on snow-fields, or wheat-fields,*

as the case might be. And the day of the week, and of the month, and of the year, and the Dominical letter, and some of those dates which theology so queerly borrows from astronomy. And the zodiac is there, with its procession of starry beasts and babies, and a Virgo, with whose prim prettiness several generations of boys have fallen in love in that hall. And a curiously wreathed tube once curled itself, like a great red vein, round the face of the clock, but the red liquor has long been dry. The old clock tells nothing now but the hour at which it died; and even this is doubtful, for the other revelations in no reasonable way coincide—the month is December, and the sun is scorching down upon a golden harvest—and it is the second Sunday after Easter.

And now come back to the door of the great hall and look out. Rich acres lie before you, and all belong to the domain of Aspen Court. Beyond this smooth lawn, and beyond those grey oaks, and beyond all that green pasture where the cattle are feeding, and far away to where you see broad water,

“The Severn swift, guilty of maiden’s death.”

Aspen Court means half a parish and a score of farms, and such a list of freeholds, leaseholds, and copyholds, as nobody, without the aid of the steward’s rent-rolls, can pretend to give you. Allow that the gentlemen at the Lycurgus were justified in thinking that Henry Wilmslow had been lucky.

CHAPTER III.

A LAWYER’S OFFICE, AND SOME OF THE CLERKS.



THE offices of Messrs. Molesworth and Penkridge, the solicitors, of whom mention has been made, were in one of the streets near Red Lion Square. Messrs. Molesworth and Penkridge were most respectable practitioners, who chiefly attended to conveyancing, but had a few profitable old Chancery suits in their keeping. They did not refuse to attend to common law, but it was put out to nurse, and a common-law clerk was kept, in order that those interested in the fate of their causes might receive tolerably plausible answers. Nor was this precaution unwise, for valuable clients have been frightened away, by their

advisers presuming too much upon the ignorance of the outside world as to the technicalities of law. Therefore Messrs. Molesworth and Penkridge were quite right in paying a wiry little man, whose only weakness was waistcoats, the sum of two pounds a-week, to avoid any such accident.

Then they had a head conveyancing clerk, a wonderful old gentleman, Mr. Ghirk, who could carry in his head the most complicated details of a pedigree, never turning a circle into a lozenge, or confounding the scion who died *sine prole* with one who died single. But he was so dreadfully stupid about everything else, that having once, on his birthday, invited one of the articulated clerks to spend an evening with him, that young gentleman, in the abjectness of his terror, consumed so many glasses of brandy-and-water for the purpose of qualifying himself for the interview, that his employer, on happening to summon him through the speaking-pipe, was answered by a defiance, through the same organ, to instant combat for nominal stakes. Mr. Ghirk was entitled to demand the assistance of any of the articulated young gentlemen whenever he pleased, which was very seldom, for he held their legal powers to be in the extremest degree undeveloped. The marriage settlements, and the mortgages, and the wills were, however, really manufactured by a most mysterious gentleman who resided in a dark cave in the Temple, and was called a conveyancing counsel. It was he who prepared, for a comparatively small remuneration, those mighty documents which were so awfully costly to the clients of the house. He again kept a hungry-looking clerk, who copied the greater part of such matters from forms his master had by him, the latter merely revising them. And the clerk again was usually assisted by two or more gentlemen of education, who paid a hundred guineas each for leave to sit in the dark cave in the Temple, and copy out "precedents," which the clerk put into shape for his master, and his master revised for Mr. Ghirk, and Mr. Ghirk carried home to Mr. Molesworth, and Mr. Molesworth laid in parchment before the clients, and the clients signed and paid for.

Mr. Limpet, "the gentleman who attends to the Chancery department," is a tall, dark, handsome man, slightly bald. He never speaks above his breath, but if he have a remonstrance or a *reprimand* to bestow, he does it in a short, severe, but courteous

letter, of which he keeps a copy. He returns all salutations with great accuracy, but never joins in or even hears any joke which may be in the course of manufacture when he happens to come into the large office. He has a separate room to himself, with double doors, and it is understood that he would prefer that any one coming in should previously knock, a wish which has, at various times, occasioned unhappiness and utterances of rebellious sentiment among inferior clerks suspected of democratic tendencies, and of going on Sundays to political lectures. A daring articed gentleman will sometimes insist on telling Mr. Limpet an anecdote, but its reception is very freezing, and the chances are that a quiet piece of matter-of-fact, or chronology, on the hearer's part, demolishes the basis of the story, and the lively young man goes away discomfited. Mr. Limpet is perfectly master of his duty, but there is an impression that he submits to it as a sort of humiliation, having designed himself for a diplomatic situation. An occasional word, rather savouring of the protocol, will find its way into his letters, and when these are being copied into the letter-book before they go out, the copyist, especially if one of the more ignorant of the group, remarks, with intense sarcasm, "Lord Palmerston again to-day."

The articed clerks are at present three, Mr. Molesworth having the two esquires whom law allows to the certificated knight, and Mr. Penkridge having one only. Mr. Lobb and Mr. Chequerbent, by respective payments of one hundred and twenty pounds each to the revenue, obtained the privilege of paying three hundred guineas each to Mr. Molesworth, and for five years may lawfully copy as much of "the trash of an office" as they can bring themselves to do, at the end of which period they will be examined in the Law Society's Hall, and if not plucked, may pay to the revenue about fifty pounds more, and then will be let loose to revenge themselves on clients of their own. Mr. Lobb is very quiet, has a round white face, round eyes, and a round figure generally. He takes great pains to learn the law, and would make progress, if his mind were not so bewildered by his financial operations. His father, a country clergyman of some property, allows him three pounds a-week, but stipulates that he shall keep an account of the way it is spent. So an average of two hours of Mr. Lobb's time every morning is spent in balancing his pocket-book, and the specula-

tion "where that threepence went to," runs all day like a vein of copper through the gold mines of Fearne and Sugden. He has also another affliction,—he writes verses, and when a new penny periodical commences its five or seven weeks' life, Mr. Lobb, under the anagrammatic signature of "Bolb," is always thanked in the first notice to correspondents. On its publishing day he always contrives an excuse to be in Holywell Street rather before the first number can be folded, and will almost risk having "been wanted," than come back without the damp publication. He will be very melancholy all the afternoon if his verses have not appeared, but the following morning begins to count the days before the next number will come out. His poetry, like that of all beginners, is either expressive of the most abject misery, or the most heartless flippancy; but neither class of lyric precisely indicates Mr. Lobb's condition, as he eats a very hearty dinner every day at two, and in the evening talks very rationally to the family with whom he lodges on Islington Green. But he has, in all probability, a common-place, honest career before him.

What Mr. Chequerbent has before him, except the blotting-paper, on which he is drawing most irreverent caricatures of the whole establishment, it may be difficult to say. He has no father, but, as he puts it, keeps a guardian, who, having articulated him to Mr. Molesworth, and arranged for the quarterly payment of a rather handsome allowance to Mr. Chequerbent himself, seldom sees or hears of his ward, except when the latter has outrun the constable so desperately that the bailiff takes up the running. What Paul Chequerbent does with his money is one of the mysteries to his companions, and indeed to himself. He seldom has any in his pocket, is in debt to his tailor, his boot-maker, his bookseller and even his landlord, besides being sorely tormented by small creditors, who make him as indignant as his good-nature will allow him to be, that they should pester him for such pitiful sums. Mr. Lobb offered to keep his accounts for him, one week, but speedily resigned his post of Chancellor to the Chequerbent Exchequer, scandalised, it was supposed, at the expenditure of secret service money, but he never would tell. Paul is a dark, jolly-looking, strong built *young fellow*, with a large nose, and an incipient grin perpetually *ready to expand into a hearty laugh*, when his small but beauti-

fully regular teeth will show to advantage. He affects a little of the sporting character and style, wears tiny gold horse-shoes for studs, and has a stick like the handle of a hunting-whip.

The third article young gentleman, Mr. Carlyon, is nearly through his term of years. Very little is known about him in the office, except that his friends are understood to reside abroad, and that he has a small set of chambers in Lincoln's Inn Fields. Tall, slight, and with well cut features, rather of the Southern than the Saxon type, he may already be called a distinguished-looking person, and probably will become more so, as the lines of his face deepen, and the expression, now a little listless, hardens into gravity. The face is full of intellect, and the smile, when it comes, has scarcely so little of sarcasm in it, as the smile of one whose antecedents have been happy, should hold at that age. He is perfectly courteous to every one, but makes no advances, and invites none. He has, in conversation, shown himself to be a scholar; and Mr. Lobb, with a laudable wish that his next poem in the "Weekly Sampler of Song and Stitch," should be *sans reproche*, has requested his perusal of the lines. Mr. Carlyon has read them, has suggested, that "from van to rear" is hardly a recognised mode of describing a scene on board ship—has hinted that there are some impediments to the coupling "dawning" and "morning" in wedlock, and has returned the poem as otherwise unobjectionable. Lobb will not show him any more lyrics. Carlyon has evinced some acquaintance with theatrical matters, and Mr. Chequerbent having obtained an order, has particularly requested Carlyon to accompany him to the Haymarket. Carlyon has gone with him, and has given him supper at Lincoln's Inn Fields afterwards, and has even presented him with an autograph of Mr. Macready, on hearing Paul express a desire to have one; yet Chequerbent does not seem to care about much more of Carlyon's companionship. It was rather thought in the office that Mr. Limpet and Mr. Carlyon would suit one another, though the latter is so much more affable than the former. It is not so. Indeed, when the notion current touching Limpet's diplomatic ambition was mentioned to Carlyon, the latter showed some little curiosity, and certainly sought two or three opportunities of speaking to Limpet. But after these interviews, which were only on the business of the establishment,

there was no effort on either side to improve the acquaintance. Carlyon was sometimes appealed to for an opinion on Mr. Limpet's protocol phraseology, but he seldom said more than that the words were perfectly legitimate, but that perhaps shorter ones would have been as well. Of Mr. Penkridge, to whom he was nominally bound, Carlyon saw little. Mr. Penkridge was a timid kind of man, of considerable fortune, whose chief occupation and enjoyment was a menagerie of wild animals, which he kept at Sydenham, and on which he spent terrible sums, besides frightening himself about the beasts in the most dreadful manner at least twice a-week. But Mr. Molesworth, who bore the real weight of the business, contrived that Carlyon, had he been inclined to waste his time, should have no chance of doing so. A man of the world, and knowing his man, Molesworth did not heap business around the young lawyer in a way which should make him feel that he was to drudge. He did so with Lobb, and Lobb worked with scarce a murmur. He would have done so with Chequerbent (perhaps softening him with an occasional invitation to Mr. Molesworth's hospitable house), but he found it was less trouble to neglect than to employ one who needed so much looking after. But he quietly admitted Carlyon into some confidences of importance, and having thus taken a sort of guarantee for the young man's co-operation, Molesworth, without displaying any such intention, made it clear to Carlyon, that to make that co-operation available, he must both study at his law-books and work at his desk. And Carlyon did both, to an extent which Molesworth was quite the man to appreciate, and sometimes to applaud. Probably not many solicitors pay so much attention to the characters of the young men who buy seats in their offices, but Mr. Molesworth found his account in obtaining a first-rate officer. Keen, self-composed, and persevering, Carlyon, aided by the training incident to the practical study of his profession, speedily became qualified for entry, with perhaps more than average chances, for the great race of life.

Perhaps it is not necessary to say much of the other occupants of Messrs. Molesworth and Penkridge's horse-hair stools. There was Mr. Linnery, who kept the books of the house, and sorely worried Mr. Chequerbent for not keeping up his attendance-book, and transcribing its costs into their vellum volume.

He made execrable puns, but was otherwise harmless. There was, also, Mr. Ratchet, whose business it was to make himself generally useful, and who had an instinctive knowledge when there was likely to be a press of work, upon which occasions he invariably absented himself, sending word that either he, or his wife, or one of seven sallow, sandy, sulky children, whom they were supposed to have reared for the express purpose of excuses, was lying at the point of death. The family, however, kept steadily at nine for many a year. Penultimately, there was Mr. Maunder, who was also engaged to do what he was bid. He wrote a beautiful hand, borrowed money from every new clerk, and was rather supposed to be an atheist, because he never swore, and because he had been detected in reading Voltaire's Charles XII. Finally, there was a young assistant named Spott, an undesirable name where its owner's companions are facetious. He was the general message and errand boy, and was believed to be in more of Mr. Chequerbent's secrets than was consistent with the dignity an article clerk should wear in transactions with his subordinates.

Such was the phalanx with which Messrs. Molesworth and Penkridge made war upon society.

CHAPTER IV.

PREPARATIONS ; AND MR. CHEQUERBENT'S ILL LUCK.



T is a quarter past ten, and Messrs. Molesworth and Penkridge's office is full and busy. Blotting paper is being adjusted, bundles of law documents are being enfranchised from the restrictions of red tape, and Spott is being abused on all sides for having filled ink-stands too full, or not having filled them at all, or spilled the ink in the process, besides receiving interlocutory reprimands for his general deficiencies of character, manners, and principles ; all of which Mr. Spott receives with great meekness, and even cheerfulness, knowing that he is rather liked by the gentlemen.

"Make up that fire, Spott, and then get away from it, will you," observes Mr. Chequerbent ; "these February mornings make one shiver, don't they, Carlyon?"

"Fever month, too," replies Carlyon, "according to the Romans."

"The Romans were asses," returns Mr. Chequerbent.

A single blow from a little hammer here fell upon a small bell in a corner of the room, close to the ceiling.

"Go to the pipe, somebody," cries Mr. Lobb: "Mr. Molesworth's come."

Mr. Chequerbent, as nearest, pulled down a slide which covered the orifice of a small hole in the wall (like the large end of a telescope) and shouted up it,—

"Sir!"

"Is Mr. Lobb there?"

"Are you in or out, Lobb?" asks Mr. Chequerbent, in a lower tone.

"Just gone out, I shall be in directly, almost. Chancery Lane," replies Lobb, hurriedly.

"Mr. Lobb is gone down the Lane, sir, for a short time—I think to the Master's office," Mr. Chequerbent states, up the pipe. Mr. Chequerbent hears a click at the other end of the pipe, which indicates that communication is cut off for the present.

"I know what he wants," remarks Mr. Lobb; "I sat up till past eleven copying it, but it is not half done yet."

"You said you were going to an Orrery, or some such scene of frantic dissipation, Lobb," replies Mr. Chequerbent.

"So I was, and I had got tickets for myself and the Miss Dingles, my landlady's daughters, and I promised myself a delightful evening; but I was obliged to give it up, to go on with this statement."

"Well, they are deuced plain girls, those Dingles," observes the worldly Chequerbent; "I don't know that there would be any great fun in taking them to see a lot of stupid transparencies, and to hear a hurdy-gurdy in a blanket, the performance enlivened by quotations from *Paradise Lost*."

"They are very intelligent girls," answers Mr. Lobb, "and converse very rationally on all subjects."

"So they ought," says the reckless Chequerbent, "considering their ugliness. By Jove, if an ugly girl doesn't talk out-and-out well, she ought to be prosecuted for being alive."

The hammer again.

"Is Mr. Linnery there?"

"Yes, sir," answers Mr. Chequerbent instantly, as Mr. Linnery never ventures to take any liberties with his employers.

"Ask him to step up."

And Mr. Linnery, carefully locking his desk, and pocketing his bundle of keys, with a look at Mr. Chequerbent, which intimates that it is for his sake that this precaution is taken, goes out.

"He can't forget the fly-paper," says Paul, laughing.

"He could forgive it, and that was more," observes Mr. Carlyon.

"Pooh, anybody can forgive," replies Mr. Chequerbent; "you don't understand metaphysics. Forgiving is a mere act of the will—if a man likes to do it, he can."

"Can he?" asks Mr. Carlyon, thoughtfully. "Well, I hope you will always find it so."

There was a knock at the street-door, and a pull at the trigger, one of whose ropes and rings hung before each clerk, released the catch. Paul looked uneasily at the oval hole in the office-door. A stout-built, not over clean looking man, entered, and Paul managed to see that he was a stranger, before the others could quite make out the group.

"Good morning, gents," said the new arrival. "Is Mr. Chequerbent here?"

Nobody seemed inclined to reply, and Mr. Chequerbent himself stepped forward.

"No," he said, "Mr. Chequerbent is *not* here. Will you leave any message for him?"

"Oh!" said the other, "then you expect him in soon. I don't know but I'd as good as wait for him."

"Mr. Chequerbent is gone to Westminster," said Paul, "and thence he is going—where did he say, Mr. Lobb?"

"I—I—don't know," mumbled Mr. Lobb, trying to restrain his laughter. "Brompton, or somewhere."

"Brompton or somewhere; yes," said Paul, turning to the stranger, "those are the addresses he mentioned, so you know best whether you would like to wait. If you would," he added, "there's a chair."

This last piece of coolness settled the matter. But for it, the stranger, who had noticed Mr. Lobb's mirth, would have pur-

sued his interrogations; but as Chequerbent carelessly pointed to the chair, and lounged away to the fire, the other said,—

“Well, then, I’ll look in another day.”

“Any name?” asked Paul, carelessly.

“Smith,” said the man; “but he wouldn’t know it.”

“Very well, Mr. Smith,” said Paul; “Mr. Spott, write down that Mr. Smith called to see Mr. Chequerbent, and mind Mr. Chequerbent is made aware of it when he comes in.”

“Yes, sir,” said Spott, gravely.

The stranger went out, the office-door slammed, and then the outside door. As the latter clashed and fastened, Mr. Paul Chequerbent uttered a victorious war-whoop, snatched a very tall stool from under Mr. Spott, bringing that young gentleman to the ground, and then placing the tottering piece of furniture in the middle of the room, he seized a large ruler, and the cover of the coal-box, and, struggling up into a standing position on the stool, he struck a classic sword-and-shield attitude.

“Paul Chequerbent,” he shouted, “as he appeared, defying his creditor.”

“And praps Mr. Paul Chequerbent will appear to *this*,” said a voice behind him. It was the stranger, holding the door in one hand, and a strip of printed paper in the other. The writ-server had been made suspicious by the answer of the clerks, and by Lobb’s laughter.

“I thought as much, somehow,” said the stranger, with a grin. “Any ways, I suppose you’ll stand a trifle for the laugh.”

“The laugh,” said Paul, considerably disconcerted; “I don’t think this is the proper way of doing business.”

“Nor do I, Mr. Chequerbent,” said a grave voice, as Mr. Molesworth himself entered from another door. “A little mad, I think.”

And the solicitor passed on to Carlyon’s desk, while Paul, looking exceedingly red and foolish, descended from his elevation, not so easily however but that, to save the rickety stool from toppling over, he was compelled to drop the lid of the coal-box, and its clatter attracted another look from Mr. Molesworth, which just enabled that gentleman to see the writ thrust into Mr. Chequerbent’s hand. Paul then made a hasty retreat into some mystic washing-room, and there dwelt in darkness until *his employer* had disappeared.

The solicitor was equipped for a walk, and you could see little of his face between his ample hat and the turned-up collar of his great-coat. A pair of searching grey eyes, and a prominent nose, reddened by a raw morning, were all that could be made out.

"Give me your arm down to the Strand, Mr. Carlyon," said he; "I want to speak to you. How quickly can you prepare yourself for a journey into the West of England?"

"Ten minutes to get to my place—five to pack a carpet-bag," said Carlyon, quietly, and without any affectation of smartness,—"and I am at your service."

"No, no, you are to have a little more breathing time than that. Besides, you will have a companion, perhaps a lady; I am not sure. Only be ready, and we'll send to your chambers. Oh, Mr. Lobbs, I called for you, and was told you were out."

"Out, sir—no, sir, I have not been out since I signed the book on arriving," said Lobbs, flurriedly.

"Who answered me, then?"

"I think it was Mr. Chequerbent, sir," said Mr. Ratchet, at whom the grey eyes seemed to be directed.

Paul heard the words in the darkness of his den.

"Some mistake," said Mr. Carlyon, "evidently. Mr. Chequerbent is usually so very careful in what he says about any one being out or in."


The interposition saved Paul, or perhaps Mr. Molesworth did not think the question worth pursuing. He intimated to Mr. Lobbs that he had hoped to have found the statement complete and on his desk when he came, though to achieve this poor Lobbs must have sat up good part of the night,—and he had paid three hundred guineas, too, for leave to sit upon that horsehair. Mr. Molesworth just glanced round over each clerk's shoulder, told Mr. Ratchet he was glad to find he was nearly through that settlement, which he was sick of seeing about, reproved Mr. Maunder for not keeping his papers in better order, told Mr. Linnery he should have something to say to him about the books, and desired him to be an hour earlier next morning for that purpose; and lastly, as Spott's eyes kept following him round the room, he demanded why, if there was nothing for that boy to do, he did not write new labels for the old bundles of papers, and thus improve his mind and his hand-

writing, and try to do justice to the people who employed him, and be a comfort and a credit to his bereaved mother. And having thus brought all the horses up to the collar, he added, in a good-natured tone, that they had better keep up good fires, for it was not weather to catch cold: and then went out with Carlyon.

"The fact is," said Mr. Molesworth, "that Wilmslow, who, between ourselves, is not a bit wiser than he ought to be, insists on going down directly and taking possession of Aspen Court. Now, as you did so much in making out the title, and laying the basis for the proceedings which gave him the place, it is fair that you should see the installation. So go down. You'll be bored with him, but Mrs. Wilmslow's a dear, sweet woman, and I don't know whether you like children, but the three girls are something better than pretty. And you ought to see Aspen Court."

CHAPTER V.

WILMSLOW OF ASPEN, AND JANE HIS WIFE.

"OT a bit wiser than he ought to be." Such was Mr. Molesworth's estimate of Mr. Wilmslow. "Wilmslow"—as he could now write himself—"of Aspen Court." It sounded moderate, but then Molesworth was a lawyer, and had been for thirty years in the habit of selling his opinions at prices varying from three-and-fourpence upwards. And people who sell opinions, like people who sell various other articles, weigh them carefully, and seldom give overweight. But I may be as frank in telling all I know about Mr. Wilmslow as is consistent with propriety, and I am sorry to be obliged to append this little qualification, but there are some passages in the life of most men, not to say most guardsmen, which nobody would presume to write about, except in the newspaper your daughters air for you before you come down to breakfast.

Lord Ambergate and the other statesmen at the club told us something of Wilmslow's history, with the charitable tone and cordial feeling with which, very likely this afternoon, or perhaps to-morrow, just as it happens, some other improvised committee of public safety, lounging at that or some other club, will

discuss the history of Lord Ambergate, or Acton Calveley, or Tom Crowsfoot. Very well-informed fellows all of them, and men who know the world, and are not to be humbugged, and all that sort of thing. But do they think, like Job's friends, that they alone are the people, and that wisdom shall die with them? We will put Henry Wilmslow's history into a little clearer form than was employed by his friends at the club. Had the matter rested with me, I would have given gentle, good Jane Tracy a different husband, and dear Emma, Kate, and Amy Wilmslow another kind of father. *Nascitur, non fit*, and we must make the best of him, and not be too hard. Superfine Tom Crowsfoot condemned him in his superfine way, but it was not for any cause which merited such utter condemnation, but because he was one of the style of men whom Tom detests. Mr. Crowsfoot has all his life been quietly wicked, not because wickedness is wrong, but because quietness is gentlemanly. Wilmslow was noisily wicked, but then he was noisy in everything. If he shut a book—to be sure it was seldom he had that trouble, but at any rate it was always very soon after he opened one—he shut it with a bang. If he stormed the gentle heart of a *coryphée*, he did not do it, like Tom Crowsfoot, *moyennant* a bracelet and a plenipotentiary, but blundered about the dark wings of the Opera-house at rehearsal-time, and kept his great stamping horses pawing the Haymarket pavement opposite the stage-door, while his arms and motto edified the world at large. Humbug as he was, his laugh was as hearty as if he meant laughter, and his loud voice rang out over other voices, as if he had not a care or a fear in the world, at a time when his debts had made him so nervous that the most harmless lounge had but to wait at a corner to be instantly transformed, in Wilmslow's apprehensions, into a sheriff's officer bent on capturing him. It was his organization that made him noisy, and laid him open to Tom Crowsfoot's criticism. We will not take him at Tom's hostile valuation.

Henry Wilmslow was of an old family—the heralds gave him Hastings, but that they always think a man has a right to who can prove Bosworth, where unquestionably a Wilmslow laid lance for the boar. But the family did not keep itself respectable, and we find it robbing under Elizabeth, and jobbing under Anne, and decidedly suffering no particular martyrdom for its

principles in the interim. But if Hastings were a myth, and a Wilmslow did not charge the British army under William Rex the Conqueror, he assuredly did under William Pitt the Heaven-born, and charged it to such an extent, in the capacity of a contractor, that he speedily realized a handsome fortune. This, Henry Wilmslow would have inherited, but unhappily for him, his revered parent, in the decline of his life, became startled at the evil means he had adopted in accumulating his gains, and sought spiritual consolation. Not, however, in the Church of England, or his fortune might have been spared. There unluckily intervened traditions of regimental chaplains, of whom, in his younger days, he had known two or three specimens, disgraceful to a body of which, however, they were not, even then, characteristic. Old Samuel Wilmslow, whose shrewdness now only partially helped him, insisted on regarding one poor tipsy creature, known in his regiment as the Reverend Cherry Bounce, and whose conversation was the commination service, (undiluted, but with an extended social range,) as a type of the clerical order. He paid dearly for his ignorant wilfulness, for having sought the counsel of a clever sectarian preacher, whose talents in his time achieved as much for his uncouthly-named sect as any member of the vaunted Order of Jesus ever effected for the Society, old Wilmslow's senses were first frightened out of him by the ultra-Calvinistic horrors his adviser judiciously conjured up,—next, he was completely alienated and isolated from his family,—and, finally, the bulk of his money was handed over—not bequeathed, the astute doctrinarians being up to the doctrine of mortmain—for the building and endowing meeting-houses for the “connexion” of which his theological friend was a shining light. So went the spoils of the British army, and the elder Wilmslow did not long survive their surrender.

One of Mr. Disraeli's characters observes, “The father sacrificed his property for his religion—the son, of course, has neither.” This would most likely have been Henry Wilmslow's case, although he had been withdrawn from Eton (where he had been sent in his parent's unconverted days) and, at the instance of old Mr. Wilmslow's religious adviser, had been removed from the sports of the Brocas, with a view to his being apprenticed to a pious woolstapler of the “connexion.” But woman, who

always mixes herself up for some good purpose in the affairs of this life, intervened. An old maiden sister of the ex-contractor, whom the high-principled and high-church lady had detested all his life, first for his swindling, and secondly, for his schism, took the Etonian out of the wool and bought him a commission in the Guards. Miss Albreda Wilmslow did more—she made him a handsome allowance, which she soon had to pay at least three times over, per annum ; and notwithstanding this, she left the young officer all her remaining property.

Miss Albreda's money did not last Captain Henry very long, but he enjoyed himself while it endured, and while, after it was actually gone, one deluded discounter retained the curious faith in its ghost which will at times avengingly beset those who ought best to know how completely a man is ruined. Wilmslow had inherited something of his father's shrewd, coarse nature, and could at times be bitterly hard, especially when there was a choice between withholding payment of a just debt, and spending the money on some unrighteous pleasure. At such a crisis he was proof against any pleadings, and took spiteful delight in feeling his sovereigns between his finger and thumb in his pocket, while solemnly swearing to a distressed tradesman that he did not that day know where to turn for five shillings, though he should be in ample funds next week. And then, having, as he imagined, deluded his creditor, he would go away and be himself deluded, more successfully, by some Mademoiselle H  l  ne or Juliette, whose poor little *meubles* had that morning been seized by a cruel landlord, whom *son petit Henri* had to pay out ; and with whom (the barbarous wretch being, most likely, her husband or one of her brothers) she shared the spoil as soon as the captain had gone too far down stairs to hear them laugh. Then he went to Paris,—he talked French, by the way, with a very pure and bold English accent, like some of his betters,—and as he combined a couple of tastes which do not harmonize advantageously for the pocket, especially in France, namely, playing high and drinking hard, he scarcely could be said to visit the Continent for retrenchment. At home his rooms in Half-Moon Street were open to all comers in the days of his prosperity, and even when it became expedient to see who knocked, as it soon did, he still held hospitable orgies for any one who had no claim upon him. But it was a queer

set that the captain liked to have about him,—a bad set, in fact,—I do not mean on the mere score of its members being remarkably good-for-nothing,—a qualification which would suit some very good sets we all know,—but in point of taste. He liked what is called the “artist-world,” but then he was incapable of comprehending either art or its nobler professors, and patronised any rattling scampish *vaurien*—if foreign, so much the better—who dressed like a guy, told profane or immoral anecdotes, or both, sketched a caricature, blew a bugle, or modelled a *statuette*. A scamp of this sort, especially if he wore a moustache, smoked cigars all the morning, and could bang a terrific piano-forte accompaniment to songs of the *Quartier Latin*, sung as they sing in French *vaudevilles* (I mean abominably), was dear to whatever did duty for heart in Henry Wilmslow. Sometimes he would get a number of these people together, with ladies who dressed very charmingly, but whom one would not have otherwise proposed as models, except to Mr. Elty and then, what with champagne and innocent *badinage*, singing, and cigar smoke (which the ladies were good enough rather to like, and sometimes to make), the evening glided very pleasantly into night, and the night into morning. And Wilmslow was happy, contributing his wine, his loud laugh, and sometimes his bad joke to the happiness of his respectable friends. These were not play nights,—the artists of Wilmslow’s set have not much to lose,—and if cards came out it was chiefly for conjuring or telling fortunes, or to show the trick by which the German Baron Sosterkite ruined young Lopy at Baden-Baden, and drove that excitable youth to shoot himself in the garden at the hotel. All this, and perhaps a little *écarté*, that time, which is short, might not be quite unimproved, was comparatively economical. But Wilmslow did play, in England as well as in France, and I am not quite sure in which he was most cheated.

This was Henry Wilmslow for the years he was first on town. And as he is soon going to be married, it ought to be said that though he had lived hard, he had preserved his good looks. He was a tall, showy, rather effective looking man, with black hair and black whiskers, both redundant. He trained his hair with great care, and liked to show a broad shiny wedge thereof, rising from the parting, and crossing his head, flanked by a

mass of neat little curls. He wears a wig of the same hue and fashion at the period of our story, but when Jane Tracy accepted him, she accepted the real thing. He always overdressed, and loved pins, and studs, and rings, of which at one time he had a stock that would have sufficed an opera singer's private life, but they all gradually went away, for reasons, except some Palais-Royal rubbish, which competent judges declined to deem security for the little impromptu mortgages which Wilmslow occasionally negotiated. In short, he liked to be fine, but it did not occur to him, as to Benedick, that to go the finer, he must live a bachelor. On the contrary, we all know for what men of his class consider respectable women, with money, were created. Wilmslow early and easily made up such mind as he had, that when he should have gamed, and drunk, and smoked, and lounged, and done a few other things, until he was satiated, and nearly all his money should have gone, he would bestow himself upon some handsome girl—widow, if you like, he did not mind—with a fortune, which he could do what he liked with. Not that he proposed in that case to go on quite in the old way—a married man can hardly do that; besides, he should begin to be bored by the old set. He would have a house in town, and a place in the country, and occasionally be seen out with Mrs. Wilmslow—Lady Laura or Lady Clara Wilmslow, if the money happened to come with a title—and, on the whole, he would be quiet; but his wife must not worry him, or pry into his goings on. That was settled. A good many good-looking men have arrived at the same settlement, and, at this minute, are going through the same preparatory process.

Fortune often helps us, but seldom in the way we expect. Henry Wilmslow fully intended to slide pleasantly from his bachelor state into his wedded life. He thought it most likely that the thing would happen naturally enough. He occasionally went to parties, visited country-houses to shoot, looked into opera-boxes. He felt very certain that either in a quadrille, or at a breakfast-table, or during an *entr'acte*, he should see the right woman, and what was of more consequence, the right woman would see him. The rest was matter of course. And this is the gentleman who expected the world to be so arranged, that a fresh, modest, beautiful, loving woman was to throw her purse at his feet, and herself into his arms, and be his slave and

comforter for the rest of his life. And what is more—it happened.

Happened, however, when he was in fear and trembling, and thinking of anything rather than affection and consolation. All Aunt Albreda's money was gone. He had long since sold his commission, and spent the produce. No more bills to be done, Mr. Shandon, the Christian usurer, would not speak to him. Mr. Issachar, the Jewish usurer, would not see him. Pactolus has ebbed quite out when these marks are visible. Actions, long since pressed to judgment, started up grim on all sides, and it was of no use Wilmslow's swaggering now, and saying that the matter was in his lawyer's hands, those having been washed of him and his concerns when it was found that he neither would nor could carry out any arrangement with a single creditor. He had long since exhausted the pockets of his friends, so far as they chose to exhaust them—the process was shorter than Henry could have imagined when in full flush, and when he had only to say he had no money about him. Besides, men began to look grave at his joke, and even to hint that though they were not straight-laced—heaven forbid!—there *were* certain outward proprieties; and he began to be left out of parties; and drags, on which he had often shouted and blown horns, were found to have their numbers made up for the race or the pic-nic. More signs, and donkey as, in some respects, Henry Wilmslow was, he could not help seeing that he was “going to the bad.” He was left, like Sir Walter Amyott, “alone with the pale ghosts of his dead joys,” and what was worse, the ghosts began to look remarkably like bailiffs.

Yet, one morning, as he was sadly shaving in his single, ugly, little misshapen room, in one of the streets near St. James's Square (for he had long since been obliged to evacuate his position in Half-Moon Street, not entirely without loss of baggage), and thinking what an utter mistake the world was, and why they brought him lukewarm water to shave with, and what a pity it was he had not gone to more parties, and breakfasts, and boxes, and where the deuce he should dine, for he had but seventeen and sixpence (and he owed a washing-bill, and the woman was waiting down-stairs, and *would* wait till he came down), and what that scoundrel meant by parading opposite and looking up at his window—it was very suspicious—and how

impertinent the bootmaker in Piccadilly had been yesterday when he tried to give him an order—I say, while all these things were passing through the miserable brain of poor Wilmslow, one of the best creatures in the world was preparing herself expressly for him, though she did not know it. Look at him. Look at that sallow, forlorn-looking face, with the moustache, which he has allowed to grow, making it still more pensive. See how slowly and sulkily he is putting on that dressing-gown, once gaudy, but now dingy. And now he lights a cigar, which does not draw well, and he is going to dash it away, as in other days, but remembers that it cost threepence, which is money, and pricks it viciously with a Palais-Royal shirt-pin—yes, now the smoke comes out well. And now he takes up his poor balance of silver, and counts out the nine and sixpence for the washer-woman, and is in a shudder because one of the half-crowns looks bad; however, he will try to make the woman take it in the dark passage, and that leaves him eight shillings, and they look wretchedly few—but the abominable woman will not go, that is certain, and so down he goes to pay her. There is a visage of melancholy!

If he only knew how pretty Jane Tracy is looking, while in the well-appointed bedroom, in Mr. Molesworth's house, then in Bedford Row (where she has been staying on a visit to Mrs. Molesworth), she is arranging her bright hair before the glass. What a rich brown that hair is, and what a quantity she has, and yet how easily and well she manages it, laying it right and left into great shiny folds, and twisting the remainder into a mystic coronal, the secret of which is known but to herself and those giraffe hair-pins. And how fresh she looks, and healthy, and English. Her figure is rather full, and if all were not so beautifully rounded (especially those arms, which you can see, as Miss Tracy's hands are above her head, and the loose sleeves of the morning-dress slip back), you might almost be an ungrateful wretch, and think her too plump. But her hands are so white and small, and her foot—well, you cannot see that, but there stands a pair of tiny shoes on that chair, you can see them, and judge of what can be put into them. Jane is not called beautiful, though sometimes, when her face lights up with merriment—it is always full of kindness—and her blue eyes sparkle, and her laugh rings so pleasantly—one feels a great contempt for

mere nomenclature. And did you ever see a head more gracefully put on? Look, as she turns to answer Mrs. Molesworth, who is knocking at the door, to ask her to come down to lunch. And hear the cheerful voice that says, "In *one* minute, dear."

Jane Wilmslow's voice is not so cheerful now, for I have written of nearly twenty years ago. She is the mother of three daughters, whose father is that fallow ex-officer coming up from paying the washerwoman. If he only knew the *coup* he will make in a few hours.

He did make it, and in quite as simple a way as any which he had proposed to himself in his days of glory. With some vague notion of asking Mr. Molesworth (whose acquaintance he had made in the opera-box of the then manager of the King's Theatre—the fact was, that Molesworth was suing the latter, and remarkably friendly) for advice as to his affairs, he called in Bedford Row, and was asked to dinner. Whereby did Henry Wilmslow not only save his eight shillings, but did so fascinate Miss Jane Tracy—how, I never could understand,—that the result was matrimony. When this fact is arrived at, it seems waste of time to talk about the motives which produced it. Even Tom Crowsfoot has admitted that Wilmslow was about as pleasant a person as a noisy officer in debt can be, and his loud manner may have imposed on Jane, who, being herself very guileless, may have taken Henry's clamour for the frank utterances of a cheerful, honest fellow. He had been a Guardsman, too; and Jane had not lived much in the world, and had little superstitions, perhaps, about officers; and then—I really do not like to write it—she was so good, and her goodness made it impossible that the country girl should at all comprehend Wilmslow's real character; but Molesworth had said that the captain had been "rather too gay," and it is my solemn belief that these words did no harm to the captain's suit. At any rate he wooed thrivingly, and Jane married him.

Mr. Molesworth could have prevented this, at least in the earlier part of the courtship; later, I am not so sure about it; but he did not choose to prevent it. Miss Tracy was his client, and his friend, but he would do nothing to keep her out of the arms of that scamp. Yet *he* knew all about Wilmslow, and about a good many other people of the Wilmslow kind. A *manager of an opera house* knows as much as most men, and

can tell a good deal to a confidential adviser who is supposed to be suing him. Besides, Molesworth had other means of ascertaining the precise social, moral, and pecuniary position of Jane's lover. That he did ascertain it, most accurately, there is no doubt at all ; and, having done so, he not only did not warn Jane Tracy of her peril, but he facilitated Wilmslow's progress in his suit. He lent Henry money, not much, but enough to keep him presentable, and he guaranteed the rent of some decent apartments for him. I think, too, that he met two or three men in Chancery Lane, and said something to them which prevented Henry Wilmslow from being driven to study racquets in the seclusion of Southwark. He was always making Henry dine in Bedford Row, but, somehow, Molesworth contrived to be very careful not to ask any valued client to meet him ; and it was observed that very little wine was drunk after the ladies had withdrawn, upon every occasion when Wilmslow was present. One might think Molesworth had determined that the gallant ex-captain should not spoil his own game.

Miss Tracy married Wilmslow, and soon found out what was meant by a man's having been too gay. Poor dear, good Jane ! She struggled with all a woman's noble obstinacy against her conviction that her husband was a good-for-nothing fellow, but the conviction was too strong for her. I shall not annoy you by describing the series of levities, wickednesses, and insults by which Wilmslow forced that conviction upon her. I have shown what he was in his bachelor days, and I would not have dwelt upon that part of the picture as I did, but that it was necessary to understand the man, and but that by explaining his nature while its developments had somewhat more extenuation, and somewhat less offensiveness, we might escape from delineating vice and folly when they had darkened into crime and cruelty. Her fifteen hundred a year was speedily squandered, with the exception of two hundred, which Molesworth had thought proper to secure, and to secure in a way which enabled him to defy all Henry's attempts to get at the principal, and even to resist poor Jane's entreaties, when her husband had compelled the poor girl to ask that this little fund might be given up to him. The rest went as Aunt Albrede's allowance first, and then her legacy had gone, and as the commission money had gone, and every other sum that *Wilmslow* could lay hands on had gone. The

hardships, privations, and humiliations to which a vicious spend-thrift's wife is exposed, came heavily on poor Jane Wilmslow, sometimes more heavily than she could well bear ; for she never had the consolation of being loved, to arm her against all this world's storms, and to be her assurance of another world's peace. And, at last, though not without a desperate resistance on the poor woman's part, her husband took from her the power of loving him. All was at length over between them, except the marriage link, and Jane's never-weakened sense of duty.

But there was another love, which the vain, and vicious, and hardening man could not disturb or destroy. They had three children, girls, born in the earliest years of their marriage. Jane never had any more. To these children she became the angel which she would have been to their father, had his nature permitted it. To these children she devoted herself with an unvarying and sedulous affection, which neither his ridicule nor his threats ever turned aside from its holy course. She could tremble away from his taunting presence, and cry her very heart out beside her bed, but when she rose from her knees it was to go to the cot, or assist in the lesson, or arrange the walk, or to work at the little dress, or to do some other kindness at which he had been scoffing. Not that he did not rather like his little girls, after his manner. Indeed, they were so beautiful, and of such various beauty, that his vanity and his caprice could hardly but be flattered when he vouchsafed a glance at the group. Nay, he took the trouble to do his utmost to counteract his wife's teaching, and stooped to occasional fits of education in his own school, seasons at which poor Jane's heart was well nigh bursting. It needed not, however, for the wisdom of childhood served each child, in turn, better than its loving mother's wisdom had served her. They found their father out, and three more hearts, little, but warm ones, dropped away from Henry Wilmslow. Who could love that vain, noisy, passionate sensualist ?

Troubles, thick and fast, hard troubles from abroad, harder in her uncertain home—so passed the first twenty years of Jane Wilmslow's wedded life. Had Wilmslow been asked what was the chief grief of their household, he would have answered, "Poverty." They were poor, sometimes miserably poor, but Jane's heart would have scorned to make that answer. I do not *know* any one word which would have expressed her misfortunes

—two words would have done it, but she was too good to use them, for they were the names of her husband.

But they have won Aspen Court now. No more poverty, at least.

CHAPTER VI.

AN EXPERIENCED PLAYER FACES A CARD.



HE Wilmslows did not leave town quite so soon as Mr. Wilmslow had intended. For a family which has long been struggling with difficulties finds various small and sordid, but stubborn obstacles in the way of locomotion. A single man of limited means can walk silently out of his club, and into a shop in the Strand, buy a carpet-bag and some shirts, and a railway wrapper, and then there is nothing but his fare between him and any friendlier region he may decide upon while his cab drives into the terminus yard. A rich master of a house in a West-end square can generally manage almost as easily, no matter how large his family, and if he keeps his dependents in proper terror and subjection, his carriage will be sent to the station in time to be hoisted upon its truck for the train which removes his august presence from the metropolis. But not so a group of five people, who have been trying to keep up appearances on the smallest and most uncertain income, and who can neither steal away gloomily, nor stalk away grandly. And but that we have had hints at disagreeables, enough and to spare, already, we might record how many of the petty miseries of human life oppressed the Wilmslows during the days preparatory to their journey. For Mr. Molesworth, to whom the family had for years had to look as to their only friend, and who had certainly advanced a long series of monies in dribblets, just large enough to keep the Wilmslows from actual want, had not thought it necessary to be very liberal in providing funds for their journey. He admitted that considerable sums would be coming in soon from the estates, but at present there was nothing tangible, and although he was prepared to do what was requisite, they must really husband everything; and, in short, the poor lady of Aspen had a trying time of it. The first con-

siderable sum, indeed, which Molesworth handed over for the expedition, Henry Wilmslow so piteously reduced by a sudden fit of billiards in Leicester Square, and by buying himself a magnificent cloak with sables, that the balance was not worth talking about, and, accordingly, he would not talk about it. Then Jane, of course, had to go and plead with the lawyer for more; and though he was always gracious and kind to her, even in days when she was most compelled to pester and waylay him for supplies, he was not very open-handed. However, clothes were bought, and Emma, Kate, and Amy, who had never been dressed as they ought always to have been, were made to look very nice (they had in a dress-maker, and worked away with her in a bedroom, for their respected papa made it so disagreeable by joking with her, and otherwise, besides smoking, that there was no sitting in the parlour); and Jane herself, but that she looked worn and weary, would, in her new dresses, have reminded Henry Wilmslow of their old days, if his hard bloodshot eyes had held a gleam of kindness in them. But by the time the dresses were ready, and new boots and new bonnets were bought, and divers other things which it may not be necessary to catalogue, and of which, for some years, I am afraid the poor dear girls' catalogue was a brief one (and such as their mother was quite ashamed to stick on the inside of the lid of their boxes, at the few periods when she could afford them a school), and when the landlady was paid in full, and the butcher paid half, and the baker up to Christmas, and such heaps of small bills had been settled, that it was an irritating mystery how others should still keep dropping in, some with piteous, some with bullying *vivâ voce* introductions, Mrs. Wilmslow's patience and Mr. Molesworth's money were very nearly exhausted. But at length all was done, and the morning actually arrived when the female part of the family set forth with the luggage; it being hardly necessary to say that the haughty Mr. Wilmslow, in his cloak of sables, had abandoned them to their own devices, and had departed to Leicester Square for a final game at billiards, or that he met them at the station, rather flushed with liquor, but looking bold and imposing, as he swaggered up the platform in his mighty cloak, discharging a very large oath at a very small newspaper-boy for running against him. He had never cared about Jane, and his wife had long learned to care only for doing

her duty to him, and of course it did not occur to either to be proud of the other. But as they stood together, waiting while the carriage glided up, a good many looks were directed towards them by other passengers—Jane was pronounced the model of an English matron, only it was a pity, people thought, that she looked so pale; and Henry was conceived, from his sables and his haughty bearing, to be some kind of Ambassador,—a sonorous title, to which folks who have not seen much of embassies attach extraordinary ideas of majesty.

To those who are unluckily acquainted with Wilmslows of their own, it may possibly occur as curious, that my Mr. Wilmslow did not, as soon as Aspen Court was decreed to his wife immediately proceed to encumber the same. A man whose wife has just had an estate of £5,000 a-year adjudged to her, is surely lord of many men's purses, and need not go very far to look for their obliging holders. Do you think that Henry Wilmslow did not remember this? And when the first supplies the solicitor sent to Mrs. Wilmslow had been squandered, and the Ambassador was quite clear that no more would be forthcoming for his personal benefit, he did march off, savagely, to Mr. Shandon, the Christian usurer, of whom mention has been made, and attempted a negotiation. But as he seemed to want the money so very much, and did not even pretend to hesitate over the price at which Mr. Shandon proposed to sell his gold, the latter gentleman began to suspect a downright swindle, and after making an appointment with Wilmslow, went off to Molesworth, which Henry had particularly requested him not to do. I do not suppose you and I care what passed between an attorney and a bill-discounter about a scamp—enough to say that Wilmslow got neither money, nor discount wine, nor a Wardour Street Correggio, nor Birmingham jewellery, from the excellent Mr. Shandon, but he did get a special invitation from Mr. Molesworth to call upon him at a given hour. And when the Ambassador came forth from that audience, he looked exceedingly irate, but thenceforth he tried to raise no more money.

They departed for Gloucestershire. But the delay occasioned a slight change in the intended arrangements. Mr. Carlyon did not accompany, but preceded them. Mr. Molesworth thought that it would be more pleasant for Jane (for whose comfort,

except in the article of matrimony, he had always shown more concern than it was his custom to exhibit for anybody but his own family) to find the Court prepared to receive her. So, a day or two after his first intimation to Carlyon that he was to go to Aspen, he sent for him, and said,—

“Do you shoot, Bernard?”

“Yes, upon occasion,” said Carlyon. “But the capital gun you gave me three years ago has seldom come into use, lately.”

“I—gave—you?” replied Molesworth, apparently endeavouring to recal the circumstance. “Did I? Do you know, I had quite forgotten it?”

Carlyon did not know—nor even believe it. However, he only said,—

“Wilkinson never made a better. Lord Clamperville, I think, told you that I did not do any discredit to your present, when we were at White Oaks.”

“So he did, now you mention it. Oh, ah! he said you were a dead shot, I remember. Well, I dare say you are tired of dawdling backwards and forwards after those Wilmslows, though Mrs. Wilmslow does speak so much in your favour. Go off at once, and bang away at the pheasants and partridges. She will like to find a well-filled larder. Can you be off by to-night’s train?”

“Certainly. But as for the pheasants and partridges,” said Bernard, glancing at the “Law Almanack,” which hung behind Molesworth—“this is the 10th of February.”

“Is it?” said Molesworth. “Never mind if it is.”

Quite understanding this, Carlyon said,—

“There are some things which should be attended to, if I am to be away long.”

“Anything Lobb can’t do?”

“Not for a week or so. After that, the Lampton abstract must be taken up in earnest, and that I am afraid is rather over Mr. Lobb’s head.”

“He deserves to have it laid over his head, if it is. I wish he would learn some of your quickness. However, we will say nothing about the Lampton affair just now—leave Lobb a memorandum of what he must do. I’ll take care he does it. And we’ll write to you, if necessary. Linnery will give you any *money you want*. Take three hundred pounds.”

"Three hundred pounds?" repeated Carlyon, distinctly, but without evincing any surprise.

"Yes. Of course you will not let Master Wilmslow know that you have so much money with you, or, indeed, a shilling more than you need. But if Mrs. Wilmslow seems to want, let her have what she likes—in fact, you can lead up to it, if you see reason. Only not a farthing to him, except from me, direct. Would you like to take Chequerbent with you?"

"Just as you please. No doubt I can find work for him in the muniment room at Aspen—there is one, you mentioned."

"Did I? I don't remember it, but you recollect everything. Yes, rather a queer place, and the old tenants told queer stories about it, hideous noises, gnashings of teeth, bewailments, and so on—founded in cats, I dare say. Turn Chequerbent in there for an hour or two each day," said Mr. Molesworth, "and let him sort the old papers, and make a schedule of them—at any rate, make him seem to be doing something. Don't let him fall in love with either of the little Wilmslows—are they not nice children, Bernard?"

"Charming," said Carlyon, "though I suppose they would hardly thank you for calling them so. Miss Wilmslow is eighteen, she tells me."

"A dignified age, looked at by twenty-five. I am fifty-three. But they are very good girls, and, considering the scrambling way they have been brought up, they have some admirable notions of things. Their mother is a jewel;—if ever you marry, Carlyon, try for such a girl as Jane Tracy was, and treat her better than Henry Wilmslow has treated her."

"Well, sir," said Bernard, "I believe that you helped Captain Wilmslow to that lady; should you have another like her in your gift, I dare say you will remember me."

"Who says I helped Wilmslow to his marriage?" demanded Molesworth, sternly.

"Why," said Carlyon, "was not the acknowledgment part of that exceedingly neat speech delivered by Mr. Wilmslow at the dinner you gave us in Furnival's Inn, in celebration of his victory?"

"A blatant drunkard," replied Molesworth, angrily. "Does his wife tell people the same?" he asked, turning with quickness

to Carlyon. But, quick ball or slow ball, Carlyon's bat was ready for it.

"I imagine that her marriage is nearly the last thing poor Mrs. Wilmslow would care to talk about," he said.

"I don't know that," replied the lawyer. "Perhaps she may talk to you about it, for you seem to have made yourself a favourite in that quarter. If she does, I should like to know whether she thinks I had much hand in the match."

"I will remember," answered Bernard. "I think, however, that there is another subject on which she is much more likely to talk to me. I mean the state of Mr. Wilmslow's affairs, now that we have gained the estate. Have you any instructions for me in this case, or am I supposed to know nothing?"

"How much *do* you know, Mr. Carlyon?" asked Molesworth, putting his hands together and looking steadily at Bernard.

This time the latter seemed a little surprised.

"I rather imagine," he said, "that I know as much as there is to be known in the matter."

"Very probably you do," said the solicitor; "still, with your good will, I should like to be informed what that comes to. A client's affairs are important things, and it is well to have no mistakes. I wish you, should Mrs. Wilmslow put the questions you expect, to tell her the exact truth, and I should also like to know the way you propose to put it."

"If the exact truth is to be told," said Carlyon, somewhat dubiously, "the statement will be simple; namely, that Mr. Wilmslow's affairs are precisely where they were, except that, in addition to old debts, he owes an enormous mass of costs, and that Aspen Court not only by right, but also by deed, signed by the Wilmslows, is actually the property of yourself."

While Bernard Carlyon was saying this, Molesworth's strongly-marked face and keen lips evinced such obvious discomposure, on the part of the solicitor, that the younger man became convinced that something was going wrong, but he could not understand what. When he had finished, Molesworth looked hard at him for a minute, and could not help seeing that there was a genuine expression of surprise on the intelligent features. Mr. Molesworth then walked about the room for some time, breathed hard, looked carefully at all the prints on the walls, *but without recognising any one of the chief justices and chief*

barons there suspended. Then he gazed at Carlyon a little more, and then his mind was made up. He resumed his seat.

"Bernard," he said, "I do not mind admitting to you that I expected a different answer, and that what you have said convinces me that I have made a blunder, for I know you to be incapable of obtaining information clandestinely. Let me know how far my blunder has gone. What is your authority for the statement you have made?"

"Your own hand-writing," said Carlyon, still more surprised.

"Ah!" said Molesworth, who knew all about it, "I see. You found a bundle of papers, from me, sent to your place, and among them was one marked *A. C.*, and the words *destroy this*."

"Precisely," said Carlyon, "and of course I have destroyed it."

"Ah, but you have read it first!" said Molesworth, "and you have an excellent memory. Now let this be a warning to you through life. Never be in a hurry, if you can help it; and never be in the dark, if you can help it; but above all, never be in a hurry and in the dark at the same time. I was putting these papers together for you the other evening, and my lamp went out. I rang for another, and the mischief was done while Spott was running for it. I laid my hand on that paper, which I fancied I had placed in my drawer, and it slipped into your bundle, which I sent off hastily as I was going home. I explain this to you for a reason."

"One which I can divine, sir, I suppose. I have accidentally, become acquainted with what I was not intended to know."

"Neither you nor any one else at present," said Molesworth. "I tell you that in confidence. The deeds were not prepared in our office, but in—in Wales, in fact," said Mr. Molesworth, "that no one might chatter needlessly. But you have the secret, such as it is. Do you know that one of the greatest will-causes in the books was lost by just such an accident in 1817?"

"All that need be done," replied Carlyon, "is to revert to the question I asked you. Supposing that Mrs. Wilmslow makes the inquiries I anticipate, have you any instructions to give me as to the reply?"

"There is a little more than that," said Molesworth. "If this had been merely an ordinary business secret, a mere

private affair which was not to be talked about, I should have gladly confided it, as I have done scores of other private matters, to your management. But there were powerful reasons against my doing so in this case, or rather, against my confiding it to any one living. I prepared the deeds myself; they were engrossed with blanks and filled up by another hand, who knew nothing of their contents."

"And the signatures?" thought Carlyon; but he said, "We have taken similar precautions once or twice before. They often do it in the country to baffle the curiosity of gossiping local stamp-distributors."

"But this is a more important affair than an aristocratic mortgage or a shabby marriage-settlement," said Molesworth. "And as a man of honour who has become accidentally possessed of a secret, you will, I am sure, be glad to give me your solemn and sacred promise that you will never reveal what you have learned, and will act as if no such transaction had taken place."

"If you think it necessary to exact such a promise," said Carlyon, "pray do. I make it as solemnly as a promise can be made."

Molesworth's eye went over his ample table, and Bernard, tracking the glance, observed it rest upon a very small and rather dusty red volume. However, Mr. Molesworth thought better of it, and did not propose to Mr. Carlyon to take an oath of secrecy.

"I am quite satisfied with your assurance," said the lawyer, "and we will speak as if the affair were forgotten. If you are questioned at Aspen Court, and I agree with you that it is more than likely, keep as near to facts as you can. Explain that Mr. Wilmslow is so much involved by twenty years' extravagance,—you need not be mealy-mouthed,—that though they will soon have a competency, it must be some years before they look upon themselves as resident landowners, or dream of spending a tenth of their income. I have impressed this upon him already rather strongly, and she is fully prepared to hear it, and, besides, will accept any statement made by you. Let me hear from you as soon as the Wilmslows have arrived, and you have anything to say. And so, a pleasant journey to you. *And I tell you, in all sincerity, that though certainly I had not*

designed the revelation which I have made to you, I do not regret it now. Perhaps you may see in it an additional reason why I wish you to go to Aspen Court. If you don't, no matter. So be off,—take Chequerbent, and God bless you." And he shook Carlyon's hands with a cordiality he seldom evinced except to valuable clients, with whom that perfervid salutation was sometimes found very telling, as they went away saying what a good-hearted man Mr. Molesworth was. I do not mean to say that such was precisely Bernard Carlyon's observation as he left his employer.

"I am to have the pleasure of your company into Gloucestershire, Mr. Chequerbent," said Carlyon, as he entered the clerks' office.

"Sir, you do me proud," replied Paul, with a bow of mock gravity.

"How vulgar you are, Chequerbent," said Mr. Lobb.

"All spite—miserable spite," returned Paul; "because by reason of my profound knowledge of law, and of my generally felicitous method of transacting business, I am selected to go into the country, and you are not. Where are we going, Mr. Carlyon?"

"To Aspen Court."

"I'm agreeable," said Mr. Chequerbent. "When?"

"To-night, at eight. Will you dine with me, or meet me at the station?"

"The latter," said Paul, "for reasons,—one of which is, that you have a habit of taking popular thoroughfares, and passing certain shops, which just now I find it convenient to eschew."

"But I will go any way you like. Besides, it will be dark."

"No, thank you. I will meet you at the train."

"Very well; don't be late, please."

But Paul *was* late, so late that the bell rang, and the whistle sounded, and the train went off, taking Carlyon, but not Chequerbent. Bernard wondered where his intended companion was, but perhaps hardly regretted his absence, as it gave him ample opportunity for considering the interview of the day. And he thought it over and over as he rushed across the western counties, and had by no means dismissed it from his mind when he fell asleep, and consequently dreamed that Mr. Molesworth and Mr. Wilmslow were fighting for the Amba-

sador's cloak of sables, which suddenly turned into a parchment deed, and then exploded.

Reaching Bristol, Carlyon left the railway, and struck across the country for Aspen Court. When he arrived, it was the forenoon of a fine February day. The sun was bright, and even warm, and the sky was cloudless, though its hue was rather of a faint lilac grey than a glowing blue. There had been a white frost, and it still clustered in shady nooks and holes in the grass, but it was melting away from wet roofs, and from the shining leaves of the evergreens. A dim mist hung on the horizon, and brought out the defined forms and tracery of the leafless trees. The roads were well-dried and firm, the genial moisture slightly deepening their brown hue, and freshening the mould in the little village gardens. The birds twittered on all sides, but the only song was that of the lark. Crocuses and double daisies, yellow and crimson, were the chief flowers to be seen, but the shoots of the trees were green and bursting, and all promised an early season. Carlyon had an eye for these things, among others.

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT TENANT WAITED IN ASPEN COURT.



HOSE who had been expelled from Aspen Court, and of whom we shall hear more before our story is over, had abandoned it somewhat in haste. No sooner was the final decision given, which assigned the right of ownership to the Wilmslows, than the old house was evacuated by the wrongful holders. This speedy surrender had been by no means necessary, for Mr. Molesworth would have afforded them ample time for leisurely retreat; nor was it, in a worldly point of view, very judicious, for few persons would be inclined to give them credit for the feeling which dictated so hurried an abnegation of a claim previously maintained with English sturdiness. We rather like to see people who do battle at first, hold on to the last, and vindicate original error by gallant obstinacy. And if the condemned garrison had chosen to continue in possession, Molesworth would have offered them reasonable terms. He manifested no eagerness to dis-

possess them, and would, as soon as the rights of his clients were finally admitted, have permitted the previous owners to remain on sufferance, or as tenants, as long as they pleased. Of this, indeed, he made no secret, and of his placability the defeated party had been duly apprised. But they would accept no favour, nor remain by permission where they had dwelt by right. Twenty-four hours after formal intimation that Aspen Court was another's, the late owners had taken their last look at its mountainous roof, and sparkling windows, from the carriage which was hurrying them away. The legal forms incident to a compulsory change of ownership were performed by a country agent of Messrs. Molesworth and Penkridge, and when Carlyon drove up to Aspen Court, the house appeared uninhabited. After considerable waste of energy in shouting, and rapping, and rattling, at every point where noise seemed likely to be of any use, and having awakened nothing but the echoes, Bernard determined on escalade. Causing the driver to place his portmanteau in a shed, and dismissing the man, Carlyon scaled a low wall, and thence, over some of the offices, he made his way to the top of another wall, which bounded a portion of the great garden at the rear of the house, and which boundary connected a set of stables with the servants' rooms. He was, therefore, on the west wing of the mansion. The height of the wall was considerable, but Carlyon was active and fearless, and in a minute more he was standing, rather flushed, upon the walk behind the tall trellis, of which mention has been made. It looked naked enough now, and the frost was steaming from the lattice-work.

But still there was no sign of an inhabitant, and Bernard traversed the garden, and examined every window and door in the rear, without better success than he had met in the front. The doors were fast, and the lower windows secured by shutters. The birds followed him curiously from point to point, taking up positions on the trees near the house, and twittering their commentaries on the stranger's conduct.

At last, after a very careful and repeated scrutiny of all probable and improbable entrances, Carlyon said,—

"Well, *viam inveniam, aut*. Do you happen to understand Latin, birds?"

And thereupon, struggling up upon a window-sill, and thence

springing to the crooked arm of a tree that stood near that portion of the east wing which has been described as fitted up in cottage style, he ascended the tree until he was about on a level with the flower-balconies projecting from the first-floor windows.

"The leap's not very much," he said ; " but, if that woodwork is rotten—and most things are in this world—"

And so he came down the tree again ; but a thought struck him. He searched the yard and outhouses, and speedily found a plank, which he brought to the tree, and again ascending, dragged it up after him, and getting to his former elevation, dropped the plank, so as to form a bridge from the bough to the window.

" Bold is the wise man, but not overbold, says the proverb. Now, Wisdom, keep your head steady."

And with a few swift steps Carlyon crossed his bridge and stood up close to the window ; the balcony, however, bent and cracked beneath his weight, and some of the wet mould fell down upon the stone path below.

" Quite as well not to have trusted you," said Bernard. " But the window is fast, and my destiny is burglary, after all." And dashing in a pane of glass with his elbow, he pushed back the bolt, and lifted the sash. He then sprang into the room.

In this fashion did Bernard Carlyon make his first entrance into Aspen Court.

He found himself in a small but comfortable apartment, from which the gay carpet had not been removed, and in which there were a few articles of modern furniture. A looking-glass had obviously been wrenched down from above the chimney-piece, while on the table, and on some gilded brackets, circular spaces, less dusty than the rest, showed that a room, carelessly kept, had lately been denuded of its ornaments.

Carlyon, turning to the right, made for the front of the mansion. He passed through a long range of rooms, dark and dusty, and came to the angle of the house. Pulling open a door covered with red baize, he emerged into a gallery running the whole length of the front, but not in the front itself. It was lighted on one side only, and that the side which looked upon the garden. A dark oak-floor, highly polished, and with a *narrow rivulet* of India matting flowing along its centre, nar-

rowed nearly to a point in the perspective. There were several doors, set deep in the opposite wall, and towards the centre a gap, and a massive oak-rail, indicated a broad staircase. Carlyon stood at one end of the gallery, and close to him, and nearly occupying that end, was a large window, against which the branches of a yew-tree incessantly brushed and rustled. This looked upon the churchyard, and the white church tower itself rose behind the yew. At the far distant end there was also a window, but filled with stained glass, whose many colours gave Bernard the idea that the gallery was an enormous kaleidoscope.

All was silent, except the restless rustling of the yew-tree, which kept rubbing itself up against the house, as an affectionate cat brushes along its master's hand. Bernard walked on, trying the doors in his way, but they were locked. He reached the stairhead, and found two flights of the broadest and easiest black oak stairs, meeting and turning at an ample landing, lighted from above. Around on the walls hung some very large old paintings, of which little could be discerned, except that in the centre of one of them time had spared the figure of a white sprawling naked baby, held up, in a black hand, by one leg, from which it might be inferred that in the adjacent darkness lurked Solomon, delivering his judgment in the celebrated case of the *hetairai*. Some aged maps and charts, with elephants, many miles high, populating the Sahara, and grinning sea-monsters of still greater vastness, sporting in the Atlantic deeps, garnished the lower portion of the stairwall. Carlyon, descending, came to a passage under the gallery, and running in the same direction, but instead of traversing it he drew aside a large red curtain to his left as he reached the bottom of the stair, and found himself in an arched opening, and looking into the great hall of Aspen. It was tenantless and still. The family portraits along the walls were staring out with their energetic superciliousness, the wonderful clock stood paralysed and self-contradictory, the huge chimney-piece showed the remains of a wood-fire, which had been, and was gone. The loneliness was something more than mere negation of life—there was an actual deathlike presence in the old deserted hall.

Bernard stood for some time contemplating the scene, until

its influence began to grow upon him. He stepped very hastily across the hall to the great door, and unhooked chains, and lifted down bars, and pulled back bolts, as speedily as he could, and felt glad to throw open that huge gap, and let the sunshine come streaming in, and overflow the place with its cheerfulness. And a stranger afar off, who saw that mighty breach suddenly made in the front of the mansion, would have observed a light figure emerge from it, and spring through the portico, and quite out upon the broad gravelled path, as if escaping from a pursuer. Such was Bernard Carlyon's first progress through the old house at Aspen.

Needless to say, that the first of such sensations was the last with Carlyon, or that he speedily re-entered the house, and explored its open chambers, high and low. And having finally convinced himself that the place was utterly abandoned, he proceeded to make arrangements for the reception of its owners. He placed an old couple, from the neighbouring village, in temporary possession, and obtaining a horse, crossed the country to the nearest town, where he enlisted the services of the necessary tradesmen. Carlyon's knowledge of business and decided manner greatly facilitated the rest, and having selected a set of apartments, such as he thought Mrs. Wilmslow would prefer, in a very few days he was prepared for her reception. Five or six rooms, on the west front, had in that time been made to look very comfortable. Carlyon carried out the spirit of his instructions from Mr. Molesworth, even to the extent of telling a couple of eager, smiling, red-handed country girls, strongly recommended to him by a farmer with whom he had made acquaintance, that though he could not undertake to engage them, he advised them to be in the way when Mrs. Wilmslow arrived. For a bachelor, he really contrived to forget very little that was absolutely wanted.

The superintending these arrangements occupied most of Bernard's time, but he contrived to make himself acquainted with the features of the estate, and of the country immediately around. He was surprised to find that no servant of the late occupants, no steward, wood-bailiff, or even gamekeeper appeared to assist his investigations, or to ask for renewed employment. Such was the case, however ; and on inquiry in *the village, and elsewhere*, he was unable to learn that such

officials had ever been engaged for Aspen. The tenants had paid their rents at the Court. What had to be done upon the estate was always done suddenly and well, but by strangers, who arrived, did it, and departed. The game, which was plentiful in that county, and severely preserved all round, was neglected by the owners of Aspen Court, to the exceeding indignation of their aristocratic neighbours, whose little armies of keepers were in constant and direful night-battles with poachers. The menials of the mansion, if there had been any, had departed with their employers, and there certainly never was a case of more complete dispossession of a family.

In about a week the Wilmslows arrived, and were welcomed on their threshold by the vigilant Carlyon, flanked by old Jubble and his old wife, the rear being brought up by the rosy Martha and the sturdy Mary, whose curtsies began when the carriage was seen at the gates, and ceased at no particular time during that day. The Ambassador, in his sables, got out first, looking rather cross, the brandy he had taken at a great many places on the road, having, with the journey itself, simply irritated him. Carlyon handed out gentle Mrs. Wilmslow, who, even at the moment of taking possession of her prize, never thought of entering until her children were by her side. Bernard, after the first salutation, drew back, in order that if there were any kindly or gentlemanly instinct left in Wilmslow, the latter might introduce his wife to her newly-won home. But the Ambassador strode hastily forward into the hall, and Bernard, with one glance at him, and the faintest half-smile at his own absurdity, in supposing that Wilmslow would act otherwise, addressed a few earnest words of courtesy to Jane, as he conducted her through the porch.

"Let me have the very great pleasure, Mrs. Wilmslow, of being the first to congratulate you on taking possession of Aspen Court," he said, with a grave and respectful inclination, as she entered. "It is what ought to be said to her," he thought, but his recollection went back to Molesworth's title-deeds.

Poor Jane, not much used of late to hear a gentleman's accents, touched his hand for a moment, and turning to her daughter Emma, who was nearest, clasped her round the neck, and burst into tears. A home of her own, again, at last! No more shifts and contrivances, no more extortionate landlords

and slatternly servants, no more humiliating apologies when the rent was not ready, no more vulgar insolence to her children, or vulgar familiarities with them, rather harder to bear. Sadly common-place, Jane Tracy, as you enter your ancestral halls, but you are a lady and a mother, and, I suppose, we must forgive you for not treading haughtily, and with flashing eyes, and stamping on your hearthstone, and planting your victorious banner. You may have your cry out, holding pretty Emma's neck, and making her cry too. The other two girls would join you and have quite a scene, but a word or two from Bernard, said very kindly, shows them that they had better not; but they will not go away, though a minute before they were dying to start on a journey of exploration.

The Ambassador, having surveyed the hall, comes up, and is, of course, utterly unable to comprehend why his wife should be crying. However, he is good enough not to reproach her, but advises that the carriage be sent off, and the door shut, as it is such a cursedly raw day, and demands of Carlyon whether he has got a decent cigar to give him, for the weeds he bought at Bristol were not fit to fumigate the fleas in a poodle. And receiving a satisfactory answer, he playfully enfolds little Amy in his great cloak, and imitates the roar of a bear, and really seems improved for social intercourse, by the feeling that at last he has got hold of Aspen Court.

Mrs. Wilmslow, having dried her eyes, and kissed Emma—and if you had seen how pretty Emma looked, with her bright blue eyes, and with her rich brown curls, rather about her face from the journey and the embracing, but not a bit limp though, and with the fresh colour which the Gloucestershire air had already given her, you would have thought she as richly deserved kissing as any girl of eighteen ever did in this world—business proceeded. Carlyon presented his four vassals, explaining that their adherence was dependent only upon the will of the lady of the manor, and the red-cheeked maidens bobbed and blushed with great vehemence. Then, apologizing for showing Mrs. Wilmslow the way in her own house, he marshalled her and the young ladies to the apartments he had prepared, explaining that he had ventured to do no more than *was absolutely necessary*, as Mrs. Wilmslow might not even *like the rooms*. And Jane thanked him in her sincere, quiet,

ladylike way, while the girls, declaring that everything was perfect, instantly proceeded to re-arrange everything, incessantly appealing to their mamma and Mr. Carlyon whether they were not infinitely improving the place. Bernard thought that three girls could not appear to more advantage than did Emma, Kate, and Amy, as hastily removing their bonnets and cloaks, but retaining certain invaluable jackets, warm and close fitting, just the things for travelling, they ran about pulling a table one way, and carrying chairs another, pushing a couch into the middle of a room, and then, seized with a judicial caprice, all suddenly sitting down in a row, on the same sofa, flushed and laughing, to consider the general effect.

That was a good opportunity for Carlyon to remark—we will do the same—that Emma, as has been said, was blue-eyed and brown-haired. Her features were of a pure Grecian type, but not so regular as to be severe. Her complexion was very fair and delicate; and although not so full in form as her mother had been when young, her figure was symmetrical in its rounding grace, and held obvious promise of perfection. Kate, the second, was slighter, as tall as her elder sister, but darker, and with more aquiline features, and beautiful brown eyes, capable, when the young lady was surprised, or meant fun, of expanding very largely. Kate's hair was dark-brown and braided; her head was excellently set on, and though there was somewhat more of sauciness in the face than in that of the gentler Emma, still the expression was high-bred, and good. As for that other merry little girl, with eyes like Kate's, and hair like Emma's and a voice and a laugh that are like everything pleasant and musical, we can hardly assign her a style yet, but she is thoroughly English, and her name is Amy. They have all very pretty hands, now a little dusty with their work, and there are six charming feet hidden in those warm travelling boots. Jane Wilmslow looks at them proudly, and yet is almost ready to cry again at the idea that in future they will have nice large rooms, wholesome air, plentiful exercise, and—but, here comes the Ambassador for his cigar: he pronounces your rooms decent enough, but swears that he will have a smoking room and a sofa to himself, where a fellow can lie about and not hear anything about French verbs.

Up spring the girls—and now to see the whole house from

end to end. Will mamma go? No, mamma is tired; besides she must talk to the servants, with all thanks to Mr. Carlyon for his thoughtfulness. Papa—well, they ask him very dutifully, and not at all as if they would rather he did not come; however, they do not look very sad when he refuses, saying that Carlyon's cigars are very good, and that he shall walk out. Well, then they must ask Mr. Carlyon which way they had better begin, and of course he undertakes to give them the points of the country. He remembers that all the doors in the long gallery are locked, and suggests that if everybody searched for the keys, which must be somewhere, it would be well. The proposition is carried unanimously, and a reward is proclaimed for the finder, namely, the right of first entering all the rooms. And so the three young ladies and Mr. Bernard Carlyon descend again into the great hall.

He draws the red curtain back, shows them the staircase, and explains how the gallery runs, and how the wings turn; and they listen attentively, especially Kate, who has a knack of comprehending explanations and remembering them. And then the girls all run up-stairs, declaring that they know all about it, and Carlyon, though aware that they all like him very much, thinks that he had better leave them just now to amuse themselves. Yet he would like to see them skimming down the long gallery, it was so lonely when he first entered it, and those three bright figures would make the picture quite a new one. So he mounts the stairs, and arrives at the top just in time to see them gliding along towards the baize-covered door, through which he had originally come into the gallery from the east wing. Amy turns and waves her handkerchief, he answers the signal, and they are gone.

Carlyon takes the other direction, and walks up to the coloured glass window, which he examines with care, and pronounces to be very bad, and fit to be a present from a mediæval-minded glazier to a fifteen hundred pound church. He resolves to counsel the girls to practise archery in the gallery, placing their target in that end. And then he turns, and considers his position in the house, and meditates two or three things which he will do, if Molesworth does not soon write to him to return. If he is to stay there, he has no idea of wasting his own time *as well as* Mr. Molesworth's. If there is no letter in the

morning, he will ride over to town, and get some books. And this is a good hunting country—there seems no reason why he should not see about that too, and he speculates whether the Ambassador has ever been a hunting man. Most likely not, he thinks. Wilmslow can scarcely have cared for an amusement not intrinsically vicious. And then he thinks again, that if he, Bernard Carlyon, had been bringing a wife to Aspen Court, which she had won for him, he—but he makes an impatient gesture, and is actually displeased with himself for his own presumption in comparing himself for a moment with such an animal as the Ambassador. Even involuntary as was the comparison, it was humiliating, and—

One loud, long shriek.

It came from the east wing, where the girls are. One moment to assure himself of this, and the next he is flying down the gallery at his best speed. Through the baize-door, and into the wing, and he looks hard before him as he runs, but can see nothing of them. Still on from room to room, searching each with one sweeping glance as he passes—on—on—he has reached the room into which he broke. Yes, for there is the shattered window, and the bent balcony. They have gone further, a door is open. Through it, and he hastily passes three or four small dark apartments, with shutters closed, but light streaming through their crevices—the girls are not in any of these. But straight before him, and still a couple of rooms off, another door—open, and the apartment is obviously darkened—is that sobbing? They are there.

Amy is kneeling on the floor, in the extreme of terror, and Emma and Kate are seeking to drag her away. But she stares as if spellbound.

There is a strange sight before her. The room is partially closed, but there is light enough to reveal its general character, which appears, at first sight, to be that of a sort of laboratory, with a table in the centre. Beside the table is a figure, upon which the light chiefly falls. Seated in a chair, in an attitude of grim jauntiness, and seeming to regard the terrified group of girls with a courteous grin, sits the pictorial Death—a Skeleton. One elbow leans on the table, but its bony finger is crooked, and beckons the living towards it. The other arm hangs down, and holds, in mockery, a gay Cavalier hat and

feather, and the legs are inserted in the spacious boots of the same period.

Amy had broken in first, and taking in the ghastly object with a look, uttered the scream which Carlyon had heard, and fell on her knees. Her sisters, arriving a moment later, were not so astounded but that they had a thought for her, and were striving to force her out. But she resisted, and, terrified as they were, the task was beyond them.

"Oh! take her out!—take her out;" they cried, piteously, as Carlyon entered.

He also comprehended the scene at a glance, but not in terror. I hope that the fierce curse Carlyon launched against the contriver, whoever he were, of that hideous jest, will not be written down against him as a sin.

"Better," he said, in the kindest voice, "to let her see the atrocious folly in full light, or the impression may abide with her." And he tore back the shutters with a strong and hasty hand.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. BERNARD CARLYON GOES A FISHING.

THE light filled the room. The three girls and Carlyon were in a formal, oak-panelled chamber, scantily furnished, with numerous shelves around it, on some of which were broken retorts, blackened crucibles, jars, portions of galvanic batteries, tubes, cracked glasses, and other chemical *débris*. An old brass-clamped cabinet, and the high-backed arm-chair, occupied by the ghastly object, now shorn of all its effectiveness, were, with the table on which a few books were scattered, the principal contents of the apartment.

Carlyon threw open the window, and then hastened to raise poor little Amy from her kneeling position.

"Surely," he said, cheeringly, "you do not mean to be frightened by that collection of surgeon's rubbish. The owner had no business to leave it here, certainly, and we will put it away for him, or we will send it after him in a great parcel, won't we? Come, Amy dear," he continued, in a tone of tender reproach, "*this is sad cowardice in one of the heiresses of Aspen.*"

"Oh! I wish we had never come to Aspen," sobbed Amy, opening her eyes, but taking piteous care that her glances should fall upon her sisters, and away from the spot where her instinct told her the vision of terror was still to be seen. "That dreadful thing will sit by my side in my dreams, and some day—and some day——" and her sobs stifled her utterance.

"And some day," urged Carlyon, gently, "you will laugh at it for pretending to be a terror, when it is only some dusty old bones tied together by wires, and dressed in the rubbish of a masquerade shop, and then it will tumble all to pieces out of your dreams, as it shall do now in two minutes out of the chair, if you will just let your sister support you while I see to it."

"Then you do not think," said Emma, in an undertone, "that he—that it has been sitting there ever since he died—the hat is a cavalier's—I mean that he did not die there, and never was discovered until we——"

"No, that cannot be," said Kate, who, though still very white, had recovered her self-possession; "look at that book on the table, it is Johnson's Dictionary."

"Just so," said Bernard, looking at the speaker with considerable admiration, "that is the way to deal with mystifications. But I will convince you even more completely, in a moment, if Amy will release me," for the still agitated girl clung to him convulsively, and could hardly be induced to transfer her grasp to Emma. "There! now for our spectre."

And approaching the skeleton, he removed the hat, lifted the legs from the boots, which he pushed away in different directions, brought down the beckoning arm, and, finding that the figure had been carefully secured by ligatures, so as to preserve its attitude, he tore them away, and the human scaffold subsided helplessly into the arm-chair.

"It is rather for Amy's sake than for yours that I am doing this," he observed; "it may be well that she should see what a very commonplace contrivance has terrified her. You see it is all wired, and was probably borrowed from some surgeon's cabinet, in order to be set up here." And he removed the skull, and doubled up the skeleton on the table. Carlyon then sat down in the chair vacated by the apparition, and begged Amy to look round.

Slowly, and urged by the affectionate entreaties of her sisters,

Amy brought herself to note the heap of bones on the table, and after a shudder she gazed steadily at them. But the next moment her gaze fell upon Bernard, who occupied the seat in which the skeleton had been, and who, unconsciously had taken nearly the same attitude as that in which the figure had been placed. Her eyes dilated, and she uttered a wild cry.

"Oh! worse, worse—come out, come out, come out!" and she broke into an hysterical passion, followed by violent weeping.

"If mamma were here," said Emma, looking very much distressed.

"I suppose she must know," said Kate, "or else it would be pleasant to keep this from her, for a little while at least; for she is not well, and ought not to be grieved on the first day of her arrival. We would tell it her afterwards as an adventure; but Amy's poor eyes will betray all; and then your white cheeks, Emma. What do you think, Mr. Carlyon?"

"If it were possible to save Mrs. Wilmslow any vexation," said Bernard, "and you thought I could assist in any way—let us think. Your sister is calmer now; what would an hour in the fresh air do towards bringing back all your complexions? There must be some way out from this part of the house, so that you might avoid the hall. I wonder what there is beyond this room. Shall we see?"

"I hope we shall make no more discoveries," said Kate, a little tremulously.

"At any rate, I will be the pioneer," said Bernard, crossing to a door on the further side of the room. "I told you how I had to break in at a window on this wing; it would have been curious if I had selected this room for my entry."

"How glad I am that you did not," said Emma, earnestly. "You would have seen the horrid thing through the window, started back, lost your footing, and fallen down upon the stone pavement. Oh! I am so glad you did not. How dreadfully cruel and wicked it was to set it up here."

"Something tells me, as they say in novels, I mean, though, that I think it most probable, that some day I shall have an opportunity of making that observation to the person himself," said Carlyon, quietly, "in which case I shall remember Amy's terror, though I hope she will have forgotten it. This door is locked, but I think I can force it."

But Kate's quick eye, now that she had regained her composure, caught sight of a glimmer of metal on the table.

"So, the keys," said Bernard. "It was determined, you see, that we should come here before getting into the rooms in the gallery. The right of first search is with you. Will you begin here?"

But Kate shook her head, and Carlyon proceeded to try the keys, and at length the lock gave way. The girls drew back, half expecting some second frightful appearance; but when the door was opened, there was seen but a well-lighted landing, from which a narrow stair led down to the lower floor. At the foot of the staircase, as Bernard had expected, was a small strong door, which let them out into the grass-covered garden.

"This part of our domain seems dreadfully neglected," said Emma, delighted with the ample plot before them; "but we are great horticulturists, and we must take it in hand. This grass must be mown close, and—Amy, dear child, what *is* it?" she exclaimed, as Amy threw herself into Kate's arms, and pointed at some object from which she averted her face. They followed the direction of her finger.

"Her nerves are terribly shaken," said Bernard; "she has caught sight of that statue of Phocion, and fancied it into another terror. I fear every place will be haunted for her for some little while."

"I see that we shall not be able to keep it secret," said Kate, regretfully. "Amy is alternately hot and cold, and too ill for any one to overlook the signs, and mamma least of all. Do you bring her in, and I will go on and prepare mamma."

"But you need not go back the same way," said Carlyon, considerably; "I can bring you round to the front."

"Do, do take Emma and Amy that way," said the spirited girl; "I am not at all nervous now," and she tripped back to the door. Whether her good little heart did not beat fast, as she re-entered, alone, the apartment of the skeleton; whether she looked straight before her as she passed through, or risked a glance at the chair, or even at the heap of bones on the table; or whether her little feet did not make very rapid way through all those darkened rooms and the apartments beyond them until she came into the gallery, it would be unkind to inquire. But it is certain that so effectual was Kate Wilmslow's

command over her nerves, that she managed to enter her mother's room with something like a smile, and to tell her story so clearly and gently, that Mrs. Wilmslow was ready at the hall-door with quiet, unquestioning, comforting love in her great blue eyes, to receive her fluttering little one when she came up, and to conduct her to her nest.

Some time passed, and the Wilmslows began to settle in their new home. Mrs. Wilmslow had a confidential interview with Carlyon, and declared herself very grateful to Mr. Molesworth for the forethought which had dictated his provision for her comfort, entirely coinciding in his idea as to the prudent and quiet life which, for the present, it would be necessary for them to lead. She surveyed, in her own noiseless way, every portion of the house, made herself perfectly acquainted with its capabilities and advantages, and soon expanded Carlyon's arrangements into a charming series of rooms, over which her womanly taste, aided by a moderate outlay, diffused that pleasant refinement which enhances, not sacrifices, comfort. A cheerful sort of den was set apart for the Ambassador and his smoke; and it was made so luxurious, with its couch and its lounging chair, and its selection of exceedingly light reading—some yellow-papered French novels among the rest—that one might almost suppose that the designing contrivers did not care how many hours the head of the family might spend there. And as for the details of domestic administration, I do not think it can be necessary to say how cleverly and sensibly Jane managed them, or how speedily as charming a *ménage* was organised as her means permitted, or as could indeed be desired in the retirement to which the family was destined. Jane herself was for the time more completely happy than she had been, poor thing, for many a long year, and she thought that if, while their resources were nursing up, she could obtain the assistance of an accomplished governess in completing the education of her daughters, and could manage to keep some little ponies, extravagant woman, for their use, and if Mr. Molesworth would let her know exactly how much money she might calculate upon, and at what times it would arrive, she should have nothing to do but be thankful that, after so many shipwrecks, she had got into a quiet port at last. *Dieu dispose.*

As for the Ambassador himself, it was quite delightful to see

what a change was wrought upon him by his changed circumstances. He became almost bearable. He flew into very few passions in the course of the day. Even if he could not see his boot-hooks at the moment he wanted them, or his cigar-match missed fire, or the water in his little grog-kettle delayed to boil, he really swore very mildly, considering the provocation ; and was so amenable to reason as to admit that his wife might not be exactly in fault in the matter, beyond her keeping such somethingly stupid servants, who could not remember a blessed thing they were told, and be somethinged to their idiotcy. Then he got himself a spade, and set to work to dig the garden, a capital occupation, which he pleasingly varied by chopping into instalments all the long worms he turned up. He bought an unfortunate dog from the village, and devoted himself very sedulously to teach it conjuring tricks, and for three days the girls were made very unhappy by its howls under his flogging ; but on the fourth it bit him, so he hanged it, partly in wrath and partly in fear lest it should some day go mad, and he should thereupon become so too, for the gallant ex-captain's philosophy hardly comprised the latest improvements. And Carlyon having procured a fishing-rod, the master of Aspen borrowed it, and wasted a good deal of time and objurgation upon the impracticable fishes of the Severn ; but paying little regard to the advice of the "Complete Angler" (except as to "avoiding small liquors, especially water"), he did not do much in aid of the Aspen larder, and rather ill-naturedly insinuated "silver hooks" while Mrs. Wilmslow was actually helping him to slices from the victims of the more skilful Bernard's cob-flies and red hackles. He yawned about the house a good deal, shouted and roared along the gallery and in the hall, with no particular motive, pushed one of the red-armed servant girls into the little pool in the garden, and nearly quarrelled with Carlyon for declining to order down a billiard-table. But altogether Henry Wilmslow, humanised in the quiet and wholesome life of the country, and considering how utterly devoid he was of mental resources, and how dependent he had always been upon theatres, gambling-houses, billiard-rooms, and other estimable establishments, for his means of killing time, behaved a good deal better than certain personages in this story expected he would do.

Miss Emma and Miss Kate were very exultant in their new

sphere. They saw their mother happy, or at least cheerful and content, and that was an immense thing for them. And then they found never-ceasing occupation in the great house and noble garden ; and they experienced a sense of freedom and comfort which had been denied them in the confined homes in which their earlier life had been passed. They grew fresher and prettier every day, I believe. It is not for me to say how they amused themselves, or what families of pets they gathered round them ; for though I might mention the doves, and the rabbits, and the owl that came down the chimney, and the fawn that Carlyon bought from a gamekeeper, and the young peacock respectfully presented by red Martha's aunt, and the kittens which belonged to the lean wild cat that lived in the hole of a tree behind the house, I should forget at least as many other in-door pensioners of the young ladies of Aspen. It was some time, however, before poor little Amy, formerly the lightest-hearted of all, recovered her old spirits, and entered into her sisters' pursuits with the zeal natural to her. If the occasion had not been matter for regret, it would have been charming to see the continuous and self-denying affection with which the elder girls tended the younger one, and how earnestly and delicately they strove to win her interest for their own innocent pleasures. Until Amy was well enough to join their walks, their gardening, or their little excursions, not the brightest day, not the most tempting ramble, could keep Emma's blue eyes or Kate's brown hair far from Amy's pillow. It was pleasant to watch them in their daily attempts to enlist their sister's regards for some favourite or other—how Emma would insist on the fawn's accomplishments being recognised by Amy, while Kate was pathetic in her appeals in favour of the owl, because she declared it resembled herself—and how Amy was implored to get well while the ring-dove was sitting, because it was imperatively necessary she should see it, but the cage must not be moved. And when Amy did get well, and joined them, at first with a sort of timidity, but with a gradually-increasing enjoyment, I do not believe that these two foolish young ladies had an idea of being happier than when they were bringing out the roses on the cheek of their little pet sister. I have already had to apologise for some of the people in my story, and I rather think I shall have to apologise for them all before I have done ; but what can I say for these

Wilmslow girls, except that it was not their fault that they had not lived in a world where they might have become "fast," and have had staircase flirtations, and have cracked French *bon-bons* with French morals inside, and have taken a good deal of champagne, and have had clandestine meetings, and "letters left at the pastry-cook's," and have been spoken of familiarly by evil young gentlemen at the club, who would, approvingly, have called them "jolly"? I am sorry they are so slow, but I trust we shall get into livelier company before long.

Bernard remained at Aspen. Having written to Mr. Molesworth to know when he should return to town, he received a brief reply from Messrs. Molesworth and Penkridge, stating that a remittance had been lodged to his credit at a bank in Bristol, and that he was to write again when that was exhausted. It is not probable that he found life at Aspen very disagreeable, though the Ambassador was not precisely the host he would have desired: but it was always pleasant to hear Jane Wilmslow's voice, and the girls liked Bernard exceedingly. No one seemed to think his prolonged visit a strange affair; the documents in the muniment-room were a sort of excuse for his stay; but, in truth, he was very welcome. To Jane, for his kindness of manner, and for the services he was enabled to render her; to the young ladies, because they could talk very pleasantly with him, because he had made them an aviary, helped them in Tasso, and given them sound advice as to the education of some squirrels; to the Ambassador, because, as the latter phrased it, he could talk to Carlyon as a man of the world, and we know what that means when such people as Henry Wilmslow say it. One day, however, the talk in question desperately disgusted the man of the world, and no wonder. It was characteristic of the Ambassador. Carlyon had remarked how much better Amy was looking, and how she was getting over her fright, of which, of course, Wilmslow had heard the details.

"Ah! master lawyer," said Wilmslow, "don't do it again, except with the servants or somebody of that sort. You young fellows will be up to your games, and if you had only sent one of those big-armed wenches into your skeleton's room, it would have been a great lark, but the child couldn't stand it."

Bernard, upon this charming little speech, grew so white with wrath and fury, that Mrs. Wilmslow, who had heard it with

exceeding pain, actually slipped behind her husband, and held up her finger, unseen by Wilmslow, with an imperative signal to Carlyon to hold his tongue. He instantly, as became a gentleman, mastered his anger by a mighty effort, hastily mustering all the contemptuous thoughts in the world as a further excuse for silence, but he rather glared at the Ambassador, and then left the room.

"The fellow is a helpless fool, as well as a coarse-minded scoundrel," said Bernard, as soon as he got beyond the reach of Mrs. Wilmslow's magnetizing finger. And with this gentle analysis of his host's character, he snatched up his fishing-rod and tackle, and went out of the house—not precisely the "simple and patient man" which *Venator*, in the immortal Walton, had "always looked that an angler should be."

CHAPTER IX.

MR. BERNARD CARLYON AND HIS FISHING-ROD.



CARLYON made for the river at as hasty a pace as if he were a schoolboy eager to wet his line, but the gentle sport had no great place in his thoughts. None of us like to be completely misunderstood, even by those whose understandings we are unchristian enough to despise utterly, but when such people offer us patronising advice, we do, at least while young, run a risk of losing our temper. However, there are few things like a brisk walk in the fresh air for restoring to us our calm and proper contempt for our enemies, and as Bernard proceeded with a springy walk, and an occasional flourish of the sheath containing the joints of his rod, he speedily convinced himself that it really did him honour that Mrs. Wilmslow should appreciate him, and that her husband should not. But that *he*—he should, once in his life, be charged with a brutal practical joke, and upon a pretty little confiding child—and then he indulged in some theological speculations as to the reason why such animals as Wilmslow were permitted in this world.

He struck off across the lawn and in the direction of a small clump of trees, it could scarcely be called a coppice,

which stood on a slight eminence, and through which was the shortest way to the bend in the river, at which he had several times been fortunate with his rod. The trees were leafless, but their trunks were a good deal masked by some bushy underwood, and a slightly worn footpath wound towards them from a small gate in the iron fence which defined the boundary of the lawn, rather than divided it from the adjacent meadow. The path reached the clump of trees, and then disappeared, as if when out of sight of the mansion, those who traversed the park had taken their own various ways through the little wood. Bernard turned to his left, where the underwood was rather thicker than elsewhere, and sprang briskly over the ground, with a view, perhaps, of expending the surplus remains of the energy called out by the Ambassador, but which would not be very useful on the river's bank.

As he made his way onwards, the breeze blowing somewhat briskly towards him, he fancied that he heard voices at no great distance, and pausing to listen, a coarse, derisive laugh came roughly on the wind.

"Some of these poachers, I suppose," he said, "whom the Aspen people encouraged, to the indignation of their neighbours. I wonder whether that system is to go on under the new owners?"

But, pursuing his way, he heard the laugh again, and immediately after it, the unmistakable sound of a female voice, in earnest expostulation, however, rather than terror. A few more steps, and the accent told him that a lady was speaking—he hastened in the direction of the sound.

On a spot a little clear of underwood, and from the higher part of which Aspen Court could be seen through a gap in the trees, was a group of three persons. Two of these were men. The taller was a lean, muscular man, dressed in that mingled costume of gamekeeper, poacher, and tramp, which any one who has lived in an agricultural district will instantly recognise with the aid of those words. His frayed velvet jacket was not in holés, and his discoloured hat was far from being in bad condition; but it was the grey stockings and the ankle-boots, where gaiters should have been, which told the experienced eye that it, or that of the rural police, ought to be kept upon the fellow. The other man was shorter and stouter, wore a smock-

frock, and a slouch hat, and his dirty face and flattened nose had a sort of comic stolidity. The keen black eyes of the taller man, and his dark, fleshless face, bespoke the superior intellect. It was obviously not he who had laughed.

The third member of the group was a young lady, over whose singular loveliness Carlyon had little time to pause. She wore a plain blue cloth dress, which lent itself to her exquisite figure, and a small low hat, which had fallen back from her head, left a profusion of golden curls in some disarray. This Bernard noted at a glance, and some reminiscence of one of Guido's sweet saints may have flitted across his mind at the instant, but he could not wait to fix it. She was standing; an upturned camp-stool and a sketch-book on the ground showed her occupation, and that she had been rudely disturbed in it. A slight silver chain was round her neck, and to it was affixed some object clasped by the lean brown hand of the taller man—one of the white hands of the young lady herself sought to keep the chain together, and to prevent his jerking it away. Carlyon's approach had not been heard, the wind blowing from the group, and as he came upon it, the backs of the two men were towards him.

She did not seem terrified, but was earnestly entreating that the ornament might not be taken from her. She had offered them ten times its value, and she held out a little beadsprinkled purse in the hand which was not upon the chain. At the moment of Carlyon's arrival, the shorter man dexterously snatched the purse from her hand, and met her look of surprise and entreaty with another of the laughs which had caught the ear of Bernard. He looked at the sheath of rods he held, which made no light weapon.

"Two to one," he said between his teeth, "so the one need not go through the fencing salute."

The sheath waved in the air, the lady uttered a cry, and the taller ruffian, felled by a tremendous and well-aimed blow on the side of his head, dropped on the ground before her, actually snapping the chain as he went down. Carlyon, seeing that one enemy was safe, advanced upon the other, who, awakening to a lively sense of his position, turned to run. It was the worst thing he could have done, for, light and active as was Bernard, *the stout rustic*, had he closed, would have been an awkward

antagonist. But in mere agility he was no match for Carlyon, especially being encumbered with his smockfrock ; and, after the briefest race, a stroke on the leg brought him headlong on the turf, and the next moment Bernard's hand in his handkerchief, with that masterly and mastering leverage in which the knuckles do such good work. Perhaps he had learned the knack from a confidential detective.

"Do you mean to strangle me, master?" demanded the panting prisoner.

"I don't know at present," replied Bernard, retaining his grasp with his left hand, but allowing the man to rise. "Now," he said, showing him the sheath of rods, "if you resist, or try to get off, down you go beside your friend. Do you understand?"

"Well, you puts it plain enough," said the man, not without a sort of humour. "But I reckon you've broke my leg."

"Nothing of the kind," replied Carlyon ; "but if I had broken your neck, you deserved it. Come this way." And he brought him back to the spot where his comrade still lay. The young lady, who had become very pale, looked at Carlyon with a sort of tremor, and he hastened to reassure her.

"Nothing," he said, "but the extreme necessity of the case could justify this little violence under your eyes, and I now feel that even that necessity is no apology. But you have been robbed ; may I act for you?"

His tone, and the promptitude with which he had come to her relief, had some weight with her. I do not know whether she noticed that her champion was a distinguished looking young man, whose very respectful manner could not quite disguise his admiration, though he did his best to preserve a gentlemanly composure, and even turned on his prisoner with an extra sternness, because he found his own eyes inclined to linger on the young lady's face.

"Pray, pray, do not think of that," she said ; "but this poor wretch, he is, I fear, dangerously hurt."

The stout man looked at his prostrate comroge with attention.

"He'll do," he said.

"He's better off than he deserves to be," said Carlyon. "Do not think of him. Except the purse, which I saw this fellow snatch from you——"

"Suppose we don't say nothing about the purse, master," said the captured man in what he meant for an insinuating tone. "Here be the purse, if so be as you'll accept it."

"If I will accept it, you rascal," said Carlyon, who was much too angry with the man to see anything ludicrous in the phraseology.

"He means to make restitution," interposed the young lady, taking the purse with a rather singular seriousness, "and we must not refuse him permission. Perhaps he is already sorry for what he has done?"

"Mortal sorry, my lady," whined the fellow, "and humbly asks your pardon, hoping you'll mercifully look over that which is amiss, and steadfastly purposes to lead a new life through the grace of our——"

"Hold your canting tongue," cried the greatly scandalized Carlyon, giving the penitent a shake. "You've been in gaol to some purpose, I see, and you shall be back again in another hour. But," he said, addressing the lady, "as your purse is here, and the ornament, which I will take in a moment from that fellow's grasp—is there anything else which they have taken?"

"Nowt, whatsoever," said the prisoner, "which is as true as a mile of Bibles."

"There is nothing else," said the young lady; "pray release this man."

In an instant Bernard withdrew his hand, and as instantly the prisoner sprang off, and rushed away at his best speed, tucking up his smockfrock as he fled, and speedily gaining a distance which would have rendered him safe, even had Carlyon thought of chasing him.

But Bernard had no thought for him, or indeed for anything but the beautiful girl before him, and what he could say or do to improve his position with her. And usually ready and self-possessed as he was, he actually hesitated over his words, thought of three or four forms of speech, and having chosen one, decided that it was the worst, and kept convincing himself, and making himself uncomfortable with the conviction, that he was being awkward, or too forward, or too shy, or anything but what he wished to be. Yet why he should have felt embarrassed it seemed hard to say. A gentler face than looked on him, a *sweeter voice* than thanked him for his chivalry, could not have

been found. A delicately fair complexion, regular, but soft features, eyes—nobody can ever describe eyes—but the foolish phrase of “melting blue” is as near as we are likely to get, and it *is* a foolish phrase, for these eyes could sparkle,—a flush which went and came like a rosy shadow,—and then all those light and silky curls, falling from the perfect little head,—a symmetrical figure, rather above the ordinary height, and the snowy hands, of which mention has been made, these were among the charming things which seemed to suspend Mr. Bernard Carlyon’s powers of fluent utterance, just when he most required them. It may be that his hesitation served him better than a flood of words might have done, and, at any rate, one of the prettiest smiles in the world, which finished Carlyon’s business for ever and ever, seemed to imply that, at all events, while stammering out his regrets, and his hopes, and his inquiries, with a raised colour and an earnest face, he was giving no very serious offence.

He contrived, after a little while, to make the young lady understand that as she must have been much agitated by what had taken place, he would suggest her coming on to Aspen Court, where she would find a lady who would give her the warmest welcome, as it was hardly necessary for him to say, especially when—that was—under the circumstances; and again it became slightly difficult to report the speaker very coherently.

“I do not think I should be very welcome to Mrs. Wilmslow, said the lady, smiling, “or that you would be very much thanked for bringing me to Aspen.”

Both of these propositions seemed at that moment so monstrous to Bernard, that he felt quite indignant, but he managed to dispute them with some little grace.

“You would agree with me if you knew me,” replied the stranger. “And you will recal your invitation when I tell you that I am Lilian Trevelyan.”

“Miss Trevelyan,” repeated Bernard, slowly.

“You had no idea of that, Mr. Carlyon,” said the young lady, “had you, when you became my champion? Perhaps,” she added, archly, “if you had known me, you might not have thought it so proper for you to engage in my defence?”

“I had no idea of it,” said Bernard, thoughtfully. His hesita-

tion had utterly departed, but in his voice there was now a trouble of a graver kind.

"So you see," she continued, in the same tone, "it is I who ought to express regrets for having enlisted the able services of my—enemy." She used the word, but she used it in a tone that deprived it of the slightest claim to its ordinary meaning. Nor did Carlyon seem to notice the expression.

"You knew me then, Miss Trevelyan?" he asked.

"We have few strangers here, you know," she replied. "But I have no mysteries, at least none," she added more gravely, "that I can avoid. You have turned us out of the old house—"

"I," said the young man, deprecatingly.

"Nay, you know that you were most keen and industrious in discovering the reasons why the law ought to expel the poor Trevelyans, is it not so? Well, I wished for a memorial of our lost home, and I have for the last three or four days ventured into the domain, to complete a few sketches from different points. You happened to cross the lawn yesterday, and I learned your name from an old tenant who has hitherto accompanied me, and with whose attendance I dispensed to-day, not very fortunately."

"Most fortunately," said Carlyon, "if the occurrence gives you no further annoyance. If I felt delighted, before you mentioned your name, that I had chanced to arrive here, I hope you will believe that I am using no words of compliment, in saying that I feel deeply honoured in having been able to render Miss Trevelyan this slight service." He spoke from his heart, and his voice was earnest but not calm.

"If you will be so ceremonious," said the lady, "I must prepare a pretty speech in reply, for which you must give me time, because— Ah!" she exclaimed, "I am forgetting this poor man, while I laugh;" and she hastened to the fallen robber, whom Bernard had placed against a tree, and who was now giving symptoms of returning animation.

"I will attend to him," said Carlyon; "he shall be taken into the house. Let me restore what he endeavoured to take from you." And forcing open the man's still clenched hand, he took from it a small golden crucifix, to which the severed chain was fastened.

"I regret," he said, presenting it to Miss Trevelyan, "that it should have been profaned by his ruffian clutch."

"Do not say that," said Lilian, becoming very serious. "Do you observe what it is?"

"Surely," replied Carlyon.

"Will you tell me what you call it?"

He looked a little surprised, but answered,—

"A Christian symbol. Something more, I believe, to some Christians."

"But to yourself? Speak to me frankly."

"A work of art," he replied. A slight shudder passed through Lilian Trevelyan, which he observed, and instantly added, "If I have learned to see nothing more in that which you hold, and you would have me see more——"

"Ah! silence," said Lilian, imploringly; "you do not know what mysteries you are speaking of so lightly."

"I know at least," said Bernard, "that I would speak or think lightly of nothing which you hold dear." It was very early in their acquaintance for him to make this strong declaration, but he had been a little surprised into it by seeing that he had given her pain.

"It would be for your good if I held you to that pledge," said Lilian, without the slightest hesitation or coquetry. "I am one of those Christians who, as you say, see far more in this holy symbol than others do. But do not let us speak on such matters—at least, not now."

"Not now." Small words, few letters, but what a mass of comfort did that foolish Carlyon seize from them. They meant that he and Lilian were to meet again, to speak again, to speak seriously, too, which proved—but I suppose we all know this process of growing forests out of mustard-seeds.

"This crucifix," she continued, "is very dear to me, for reasons, which, perhaps, ought not to enhance the value of such an object. I could not bear to part with it to a robber; and yet had I done so I should have done rightly," she said, musingly.

"To have encouraged him to a new outrage upon some other helpless person," said Carlyon. "You see chance decided more justly than you would have done, and vengeance came upon him at the moment it was due."

"And who are we that we should deal vengeance?" she asked, almost sadly. "But do not think me unthankful for your courage and kindness, which I shall never forget. And now," said Lilian,

her sweet face again lighting up with her smile, "as I do not hear you renew your offer to take me to Mrs. Wilmslow's, I must make for a humbler shelter. I have a little pony stalled not very far off, and he will be glad to see his mistress, though he does not expect her so soon."

"You will let me accompany you to his stable," said Carlyon, quite as eagerly as there was any necessity for speaking. "That other rogue may not be out of the woods, and here is your campstool to be carried, and your drawing-book; besides, you may still be agitated by what has occurred, and you ought not to be alone."

"All excellent reasons," said Lilian, laughing, "but there is a better why you should stay—the poor man of whom you have promised to take care."

"I have loosened his cravat," said Carlyon; "the fresh air for an hour is exactly the treatment he most requires. I will then come back to him, or send the constables. Even though you should not care to appear against him, he shall go to prison for the present. By the way, it might not be amiss—" and he looked round for a means of securing the fellow should he attempt to escape.

"No," said Miss Trevelyan, "promise me two things, that you will do all that is necessary for him, and that you will then let him go."

"You have only to command," said Carlyon. "But you have not, I am afraid, studied the principles of justice."

"Perhaps I have," returned Lilian. "But whether or not, you will do me these favours?"

"Imagine them done," said Bernard, "as they shall assuredly be. If I might ask one—I will not say in return—because there is nothing to be returned—but—" and his eye fell on the broken chain which Lilian still held.

"You are looking at my poor chain," said she.

"You can hardly," said the artful Bernard, "get it repaired in this neighbourhood. But I am constantly riding over to Bristol. Will you allow me to take it to a jeweller's there? It shall be completed as expeditiously as possible; indeed I will wait for it and then transmit it to you."

"Where?" said Lilian, smiling.

"To the care of the pony, if you like," he answered, laughing.

"Ah! but perhaps the pony will come here no more, or his mistress either," said Lilian. "But it is very thoughtful of you, and so here is the chain, and you shall be told where to send it to me."

"Or to bring it to you," risked Carlyon, venturously.

"If you like," said Lilian, frankly. "Only you will meet some very strange people if you come."

Carlyon stifled the answer which he felt inclined to make, and replied with due discretion. And accompanying Miss Trevelyan to a cottage at no great distance from a boundary of the Aspen Court estate, but not, as Lilian specially mentioned, upon it, he found the cottager holding an active little Shetland pony. Bernard privately scoffed at the animal, as all unworthy of such a rider, and thought of the splendid, high-couraged, gentle, shining horse he should like to help her to mount. But he forgave the small Shetlander, for affording him the opportunity of feeling Lilian's little foot upon his hand, as she sprang to her seat. He then wondered whether she was going to shake hands with him, and was greatly delighted when she held out her pretty, white, warm fingers, and said a few words of thanks and farewell. And then the pony's hoofs went tapping and clattering along the road at a capital pace, and Carlyon, looking earnestly after Lilian, could see her ringlets lightly lifted by the wind as she went away.

He returned towards the clump of trees, pondering many things, and occasionally stopping and meditating leisurely, and then walking fast for a few minutes, and so on, until he came back to the scene of the robbery. To his surprise, he found that the thief had taken Dogberry's hint, shown himself what he was, and stolen himself out of the company. He was gone, and Carlyon, not altogether sorry to lose sight of him, concluded that the other rogue had watched for the departure of Lilian and Bernard, and had then helped off his disabled comrade.

CHAPTER X.

WHY MR. CHEQUERBENT DID NOT KEEP HIS APPOINTMENT.



R. PAUL CHEQUERBENT, as hath been shown, duly failed to meet Carlyon at the railway station, on the evening when the latter departed for Aspen Court. Aware of the uncertain habits of Paul, Bernard was not much surprised, but concluding that Chequerbent would, in time, make his appearance, abstained from writing to town until it seemed necessary to do so, especially as he was anxious not to bring another of Paul's misdemeanours under the notice of Mr. Molesworth. But four or five days having passed, and no tidings of Chequerbent having been received, Carlyon wrote to Mr. Lobb, asking him to find out privately whether Paul had suddenly emigrated, or been made a Secretary of State, or fallen through a coal-hole into a cellar, casualties to which all persons are exposed in these strange times. Lobb wrote in reply that nothing had been heard of Chequerbent at the office, that he had obtained from Linnery (to whom he owed much too large a balance) funds for the journey, and that it seemed probable Paul *had* intended to start, inasmuch as he had made appointments for several small creditors to call on him upon a day, when he knew he should be a long way off, and that such small creditors had called accordingly, and had been particularly savage, one of them, especially, refusing to go away until Mr. Molesworth himself came in, and haughtily ordered the man into the charge of a police-constable.

Still Bernard determined, if possible, to avoid getting Paul into any further scrape, and, in writing to Mr. Molesworth, he refrained from any allusion to his absence, each day expecting to welcome him to the haunted muniment-room. But he came not, and there was no letter. Then Lobb was asked by Carlyon to go to Paul's lodgings, but the report thence was, that he had left word that he was going into the country, and had *not* left the amount of the eleven weeks' bills already due, a financial statement which the landlady accompanied with some terse animadversions on such a line of policy, as tending to disturb that *confidence, which, as between man and man* (leastways, between

man and woman, which was, she justly remarked, virtuously the same), so materially promoted a good understanding in this world. Some inquiries at a few of Mr. Paul's favourite haunts produced very similar replies in both respects, a confiding waiter at one of Chequerbent's "houses of call," informing Mr. Lobb that Paul had, on the day of his disappearance, increased his large debt, on the waiter's faith in Chequerbent's statement that he was going off to Gloucestershire to take possession of an estate which had been left him, and on Paul's off-hand intimation that, as he should soon be settling, he should want a butler to look after his wine. It was Paul's way to talk in this manner, and he fancied that the people he deluded for the moment forgot his inventions as fast as he did.

But Paul, at the moment of promising to join Bernard at the station, had actually forgotten an engagement to which he had looked forward for weeks, and of which he was reminded immediately afterwards. For ten Aspen Courts he would not have broken it, but it would not do, he knew, to say this in the office. His mind was very fruitful in excuses, and a simple course suggested itself. He would keep his privately cherished engagement, and start for Aspen next day, alleging that he had missed the night-train, in consequence of the cabman taking the wrong road, or the horse falling down dead, or a thief having run off with his portmanteau, or for all three reasons at once, if anybody questioned him. But who would, except Carlyon, and he was safe enough? So Mr. Chequerbent, made the various arrangements we have heard of from various quarters, and laid himself out for a night of joy and a day of travel. For, lightly as Paul had spoken of Mr. Lobb's young lady friends, and reckless as had been the dogma he had propounded touching the use of plain girls, he had, in his way, suffered a good deal at the hands of the sex of whom he talked so carelessly. And, at the present moment, Paul was slave to a very nice Virginia.

Just about the time when he ought to have been making for the Paddington terminus, did Mr. Paul Chequerbent set forth, carpet-bag in hand, for Clerkenwell, and while Carlyon was walking up and down the platform, in the expectation of finding his intended travelling companion, the latter, in an attic of a large old house, the dingy ways of which he seemed to know well, was dressing himself with great splendour for a ball about to take

place a few floors lower. Standing back from one of the streets near the area of the Sessions House, was this mansion, which had been built in days when people could afford elbow-room, and around which the meaner houses and shops of the present day clustered and jammed in an ugliness as irregular as if it fancied itself picturesque. The large old house held back, letting the *parvenus* push forward up to the very pathway, and seemed to keep its large, dark, grass-grown front-court empty and useless, in contempt of the costly frontages measured out inch by inch to the plebeian shopkeepers right and left of it. There was its portico, with some tumid fruits and flowers carved in front, and strenuously asserted by a young district surveyor to be the work of Grinling Gibbons, on the strength of a G. which he discovered cut in one of the pillars,—very ample evidence, indeed, compared with what has assigned many tons of wooden roses to that industrious artist. For the rest, the house had not much to boast of, for the wealthy class of merchants, by one of whose members it had been built, had long abandoned that quarter ; and the building, having become successively a school, an auction warehouse, and an hospital, was finally let in such fragments as might suit the convenience of tenants, whom the owners were glad to get on any terms. This arrangement made the geography of the house rather complicated. A set of milliner sisters had the front room to the left and the second floor back. The drawing-room floor was occupied by a gentleman who made pickles, and dark stories were current of the sprats that went into those room sprats, but came out fine Gorgona anchovies, and of handfuls of halfpence obtained from the churchwardens of the parish, after a collection, to be boiled with the gherkins, to give them a fine green colour. The second floor right was a small school, where small children of both sexes came and sat, and sneezed, and shivered in draughts, and looked sadly at one another, and had no pocket-handkerchiefs, and scarcely received as much attention from their sour-visaged mistress, the tipsy wife of an insolvent coal and potato merchant (but then anybody is qualified to keep a school in England), as might be expected for the hebdomadal fourpence. The room on the opposite side of the landing was held by another gentleman, who called himself a bird-fancier ; but the discerning Mr. *Bishop*, of Bond Street, had once found means to convince a

magistrate that Mr. Glink's genius for dog-stealing was not quite uncultivated, and he was also favourably known at certain sporting taverns in the neighbourhood, as always having a very choice selection of rats ready, at the shortest notice, for any terrier eager to display his talents. The little room behind his was held by a young lady who sang at the Polyhymnia Saloon, and who made great complaints of her neighbour's rats ; and another room, between hers and that of the milliners, was the place where a monthly nurse snored, when not snoring in the white arm-chairs of nuptial bowers. Of the attics up-stairs it might be more difficult to give an account ; they were variously appropriated among the tenantry, and in one of them was Mr. Paul Chequerbent, beside his yawning *sac de nuit*, taking a very splendid pink and frilled shirt-front (not unlike those mazily cut valentines one sees in windows) out of the green leathern leg of his patent leather boot, and congratulating himself that his device had saved this magnificent front from being creased. But why?

Those who have the bump of locality—a euphonious synonym with the power of paying reasonable attention to external objects—will have observed that we have passed one important room in the house in Spelton Street. But in entering the mansion this would really have been the apartment most difficult to pass ; for while the tenants of the other rooms were strictly limited to small announcements of their names and vocations, by means of tiny labels under their respective bells, a large brass plate went claspingly round each pillar of the portico, and apprised the world, in boldly blacked capital letters, that here was situate “Mrs. Sellinger's Dancing Academy.” Mrs. Sellinger had fought hard for those monumental brasses, which were at first objected to by all the other tenants unless they might be allowed to put up their own emblazonments in like manner ; but she was a woman of manner and management, and she not only carried her point as regarded the erection of her plates, but successively won over every person in the house to consent to let them remain unaccompanied.

Mrs. Sellinger was a handsome woman, somewhat tall, with a full figure, bright dark eyes, and a very white skin, so that in black satin or black velvet she was rather irresistible than not. She was good-natured, and very good-tempered, but had a

decided manner, which did not invite opposition, and, being something demonstrative and Italian in her gesture, she rather annoyed and frightened young gentlemen at the age when they have lost the ease of a boy and not obtained that of a man ; and this is about the period when a youth goes to a dancing-school. But Mary Sellinger was very winning, and when she let her handsome arm rest on yours, and looked at you earnestly when asking any favour—and she never asked anything very unreasonable—I do not see how you could help promising it, and engaging her for the next waltz. There is this to be said : everybody makes a fool of himself or herself, as the case may be. Some people distribute the operation over an entire life. Others do it once, but do it effectually. This was Mary Sellinger's way. Her father was a retired officer, a widower, who had made money, and she would have inherited it, if she had not chosen to run away from a first-rate boarding-school with her very handsome French teacher. I believe if she had selected, or been selected by, any of the other masters, her father would have forgiven her ; but every person has an antipathy—his was a Frenchman. He discarded her, and in blind vengeance married a girl two years younger than Mary. Monsieur Eugène Saint Léger, finding that there was no money coming, bore with his pretty English wife as long as could be reasonably expected from a fortune-hunter, then beat her, and went to America. Mary, left without a shilling, considered, and then set herself in earnest, and woman's earnest, to the struggle of life. Heavy odds against her living ; heavier, in our civilised and Christian land, against her living honourably, under the circumstances. But she won on both events ; and if the profession of a teacher of dancing is not so meritorious as that of a stock-jobber, or a bill-broker, or a railway-gambler, or as several other virtuous paths which lead to the honours and coronets of society, still, on the whole, it is harmless. She had desperately hard work at first, and I am told had pawned nearly all her dresses, and had lived on oatmeal porridge for some time, when the wind changed, and her ships began to come in : small craft at first, but they became more and more numerous, and a large one dropped in occasionally, and brought others in its wake. So, when Chequerbent made the acquaintance of handsome Mrs. Sellinger (she manipulated her *husband's name* into this ; it was a sort of divorce, and made

the word easier for the East-enders), she had a prosperous academy, out of which, between regular subscribers, lessons, and occasional balls, she earned a comfortable living, besides having a little entry made in her favour on Saturday night, between seven and nine o'clock, when (in her old bonnet and cloak, however) she visited her savings' bank.

This night there was to be one of Mrs. Sellinger's best balls, when not only was there expected a brilliant muster of her habitual supporters, but it had been currently reported, on the practice evenings, that some new gentlemen (I fear the Clerkenwell ladies called them *beaux*) were to grace the assembly. Moreover, Mrs. Sellinger and some favourite pupils were to introduce, for the first time, a celebrated new dance, which she had been studying at the West-End under the direction of Monsieur Lycomède, of the Opera. This gifted artist had providentially discovered the dance at a rural festivity in the very heart of the Black Forest, and, without pausing to jot down the figure, had hurried to several small Grand Ducal Courts with it, where it had created such a *furor* that he was obliged to give midnight lessons to the courtiers, and was even detected in teaching the dance to an archbishop in the organ-loft.

Paul was a great favourite of Mrs. Sellinger's. To speak the truth, he was one of her most aristocratic patrons, for the majority of her pupils and friends resided either in the immediate neighbourhood of Spelton Street, or in the Goswell Street Road and its dependencies, or down somewhere in the city. Necessarily, the Sellinger Assembly was a mixed gathering, in which trade was largely represented, chiefly in its retail interest, though three or four gentlemen, of very different ages and figures, who were engaged during the day in keeping accounts in city warehouses, were held to introduce the wholesale element, and Mrs. Sellinger did not forget the fact, when dilating to a new friend on the advantages of her establishment. But Paul Chequerbent lived in the far west, went to the opera, and spoke as familiarly of the Honourable Jimmies and Viscount Pollys as if he knew them a bit better than any of the snobs who used to learn those affectionate nicknames from the "Satirist." And though Paul had not the least business in this world to go to that Clerkenwell dancing-school, seeing that he was by birth and connexion entitled to associate with a different class of society, he was very

fond of going there, first, because he liked Mrs. Sellinger, for which I do not blame him; next, because he liked to swagger and be lionised, for which I am afraid to blame him, lest I should be supposed to gird at some other persons; and lastly, and chiefly, because at this period he was very tenderly attached to a young lady of the minor theatrical profession, who called herself, and incited managers to call her, Angela Livingstone, and against whom the worst thing that could justly be said was, that her parents persisted in calling her Anne, and in signing themselves Lump. In this last liking of Mr. Chequerbent's I do not know whether to blame him or not. Miss Livingstone, *née* Lump, was very pretty, and as her talent lay a good deal in the personation of pages, fairies, and other hybrid creations, whose frocks are cut off at their knees, there is no objection to one's saying what a thousand people said, or thought, every night, namely, that her figure was very neat, and her legs were excellent.

It will naturally be asked, what were the regards entertained by Mr. Chequerbent towards this pretty Miss Livingstone. He thought of her a great deal, wrote her hundreds of letters, made her give him a lock of her black hair (which he wore in his pocket-book); he attended her performances whenever he could, applauding her speeches, and dances, and songs, until, sometimes, the audiences jeered him. He sent her presents, not very expensive ones, perhaps, but a long series of small ones, which women pretend to like better, because they say it is evidence that you are constantly thinking of them. He waited for her at the stage-door after the performances, till all the ballet and chorus, who undress and redress, *pour cause*, a good deal faster than the principals, knew him, and would say, "Down directly," and laugh as they went home to their cheese and onions. He would escort her home, taking a cab if it rained, and would do, in fact, for the young lady, who had two pounds a-week at the East-end houses, exactly what tall Lord Toadstool and red Sir Lepidus Pump before him, and that handsome young Sammy Spoonington after him, did in their fashion (and they were all fashionable wiseacres), in the case of Mademoiselle Ambrosine, of the *Gymnase*, who, by the way, very properly ruined them all three. So they need not laugh at Paul. I am wrong, by the way, in saying they did exactly the same, for whereas Ann Lump, or Livingstone, was a virtuous, good little girl, who supported a drunken

old father and a cantankerous mother out of her poor salary, Made-moiselle Ambrosine's morals were French. But then the question was this : neither Paul nor Angela for a moment thought of anything which they ought not to have thought of—that is to be distinctly understood ; for Paul, though a goose, was not a bad fellow, and Ann, as I have said, was perfectly proper. But then he certainly never dreamed of marrying her. His guardian, his haughty relations in the country, and even his own sense of the fitness of things—the idea, however, was never seriously entertained by him. Then what on earth did he thus devote himself to the girl for, and why did she permit his attentions ? That is the question which Paul sometimes asked himself, but as he could not give it an answer, it is hardly to be expected that I should. What an orderly world this would be if we were all of us ready with a good reason for everything we do !

Of course, it was no business of Mrs. Sellinger's to interfere, and if Angela Livingstone came to every practice evening, quadrille night, and ball that her theatrical duties would allow, if only to stay for an hour ; and if Paul managed to be aware when she was coming, and always to meet her, and to dance with her preposterously often, and to go away with her, and so forth, all that the dancing-mistress had a right to remark was, that two of her subscribers attended very regularly. She knew very well, that on this ball-night Angela would be there : and she knew still better that Paul would, inasmuch as that artful party, as he would have called himself, had requested to be permitted to dress himself up-stairs, and had arrived for that purpose, intending at the termination of the festivity, which would probably be prolonged far into the morning, to walk about the streets with his carpet-bag, until time for the early train for Bristol.

The room filled. Mrs. Sellinger, looking quite Juno-like with her black velvet and white arms, received her guests with a gushing *empressment* truly comforting to behold. It seemed to make every person believe that the evening's *fête* was given for that person's express and exclusive gratification. The less distinguished guests came first,—plain and dowdy girls of squab proportions and severity of manner, mostly with dark and high-necked dresses : a lad or two, by no means comfortable, but affecting a grin ; and the little girls of the academy, got up with great breadth of sash and stiffness of muslin, but rather given, in

their fidgets, to rub the soles of their shoes over the instep of their white socks, to the malignant wrath of their guardians. Mrs. Sellinger had a kind word for them all, and some reminiscence—for she had a capital memory—which was sure to please the person addressed ; one, she remembered, was so fond of the Spanish dance, and they would have it that night ; and another must remember how well he waltzed with her, and a third had made quite an impression by his superior *pastorale*, and so on, with variations for the severe girls, who were only severe, one ought to say, from their exceeding awkwardness and discomfort when required to talk, for they danced most conscientiously. Then came more illustrious guests, some of them parents of pupils ; and to what good seats, out of draughts, did Mrs. Sellinger induct them, and how she coincided with their opinions on pleasure, education, climate, and creation generally ! More young ladies, in clusters, some pretty ones in simple dresses put on well, and some other pretty ones in expensive dresses, ill made. There was variety in costume, too, from the cheap book-muslin to the costly brocade ; and in other matters, also, for while divers of the ladies (chiefly, I regret to say, the scraggy ones, but that is always so) were rather frankly *décolletées*, the dresses of others ran up to the very chin, and even had little frills crowning them, so that there might be no mistake at all. There were pleasant young faces there, some shining with undeniable soap and water, and some (with shoulders appertaining) on which violet powder had not been puffed in vain. The seats which lined the room became tolerably full, but the ladies had an enormous majority, which was natural, because the *beaux*—I must use the language of the locality—were mostly engaged in their worldly callings until later. But they gradually came in : the proud accountants from the city—the humbler gents from the counter—a fat man in a frock coat—a tall, thin, grave, grey man in brown trousers—an exceedingly spruce druggist, who would, perhaps, have been pleasant as a partner, but for the smell of the rhubarb—a mysterious young man in complete black, whose melancholy was attributed to the rumour of his having killed a man in a duel, an idea he rather encouraged—a proprietor of omnibuses (greatly respected)—a photographer, who made good business out of his attendance at such assemblies—and Mr. Paul Chequerbent.

He was very gorgeous. You have seen the wonderful pink front and the patent leathers, so you can give more uninterrupted attention to that many-coloured waistcoat, with its gold and glitter, and to the massy electrotyped chain, which falls in a vast inverted arch below. Paul bought this as gold, by the way, the fiction not exceeding the licence which justice has pronounced to belong to trade. His well-made coat contrasts favourably with the slop-shop garments of most of the other gentlemen; and he has tied on the glistening cravat, with its great lace ends, in a very artistic style. His gloves fit, and, moreover, are both on, while a good many of the other men have deemed it proper to keep the right glove off until they have shaken hands with Mrs. Sellinger. Altogether, we may be proud of our Paul's appearance, though he has no business in a Clerkenwell dancing academy.

A fiddle, a cornet-à-piston, and the pianoforte have gone merrily to work, and quadrilles have been danced, and a German waltz (Weber's last) and a *deux-temps*, and partners are being taken for the Spanish dance, and Paul is getting into a fidget. Of course you observe why. But where can she be? And had he not sent her up a beautiful bouquet from Mary Johnson's, in wool and a box, with a message to be early? What is she about? And dark visions, with which the tenor singer at the theatre is a little mixed up, rush across Paul's mind, for I believe that Arimanes has never more power with a man than when a woman is keeping him waiting.

However, Paul is too brilliant an ornament of that assembly to be allowed to remain idle; and though he did not much wish to dance, Mrs. Sellinger picked out a pretty partner for him, and he went through the Lancers with comparative composure. Still no Angela.

The revelry proceeded, but it had no charms for him. He yielded to handsome Mrs. Sellinger's wish, however, and polked with her, the rather that he had an opportunity of murmuring his discontent into her pretty little ear. And she comforted him by assuring him that no doubt Miss Livingstone would come; it was early, and so many little things delayed a girl; her dress wouldn't hook, perhaps, or her mother might have had a fit—he must not worry himself. What a lovely waistcoat, and how kind of him to get it to do honour to their little ball!

Now, Mrs. Sellinger affected not to give supper ; but, by an arrangement with the milliners on the other side of the hall, their apartment was, for this night only, and by particular desire, made a sort of refectory, and eating and drinking (I beg to use substantial words, for it was no case of trifle and Moet) began early, and went on steadily, more steadily, perhaps, than some of the gentlemen, who, mopping their foreheads with rather coarse Irish cambric, refreshed themselves with much ale, brandy and water, and other light drinks. Nor were the ladies forgotten by those who chose to remember them. All articles were paid for on the instant (a formula rendered necessary by certain excise laws) ; and those who were bounteous treated their partners, and those who were shabby only led them to their places. Bad luck for a simple youth of limited means with one of those shrewd Clerkenwell matrons tacked to his arm.

Still Angela Livingstone came not, and Paul's discomfiture was fast completing. He sought to drown his vexation in the revel, and his care in the bowl. He recklessly asked everybody to dance with him—long, short, ugly, pretty ; and as regularly took his partner, nothing loth, into the opposite room for refreshment, which, in his case, meant hot brandy and water. Then he would hurry back, and rush through another wild dance, defying all conventionalities, knocking up against other people, and making himself less popular than conspicuous. He had two or three remonstrances addressed to him—a sneer from a haughty accounting clerk, a “Come, sir, I say,” from a half-demolished counter-jumper, but he heeded them not, and whirled away in his fiery waltz, as if he were in the arms of one of the terrible Night Dancers, and doomed to gyrate until death.

There was a decided ill-feeling in the room against Paul, and even Mrs. Sellinger began to wish he were away ; for not only did he persevere in his unseemly dancing, but began to taunt those around him with great audacity. He knew many of them, and unhesitatingly availed himself of his knowledge to address them in epithets which, however amusing to other persons, are esteemed rather injurious by the individual at whom they are hurled across a quadrille. He reminded the spruce druggist that it was his turn to advance with the unhandsome hint of “Now, old Pill-boxes, cut in ;” and remarking that the fat man

in the frock-coat was stumbling over a troublesome story to Mrs. Sellinger, Paul poked him in the ribs, remarking,—

“Proceed, sweet warbler, your tale interests her.”

Suddenly there was a modest rap at the great door of the house, and after some delay, Mrs. Sellinger was called out. When she reappeared, Paul was in the middle of a *cavalier-seul* (a figure much liked at the East-end), and was exciting the indignation of the quadrille by his gestures. Hazy with liquid as he had become, he nevertheless saw that Mrs. Sellinger's eye was upon him, and that she intended to speak to him, and he instantly guessed that she had heard of Angela. Without the slightest ceremony, or a word to his partner, he dashed across the room, and was by the lady's side.

“She's come?” he asked, in an eager whisper.

“Yes, but not to stay. Now pray——” but what Mrs. Sellinger was going to pray for was never known. Paul pulled the door open, driving forward a cluster of people who were standing by it watching the dancers, and rushed out. Yes, in the hall, there was Angela, but with a bonnet and a black cloak. He sprang to her side.

“Oh, my *dear* Paul,” she said, “I am so sorry, but it was not my fault. They never gave me notice that the second piece was changed, and that I should have to play to-night, till I got to the theatre, and——”

“Hang the theatre,” cried Paul: “I wish it was burned. But here you are; better late than never. Off with your bonnet and cloak, and I'll take you in. We'll have a terrific polka. Will you take some refreshment first?”

“I am afraid you have been taking too much, dear,” said the pretty girl, shaking her head. “But I can't come in. I hurried off the instant the curtain was down, to explain, for fear you should think me unkind; and now I must go back. I have a cab.”

“Go back—not a bit of it,” said Paul, vehemently. “Now you are here, you shall stay, and we'll have some fun. Come,” and he dexterously removed her bonnet, and lo! a beautiful wreath in her hair of silver leaves and green grapes. “Just the identical thing,” said Paul, “that will astonish these Clerkenwell snobs and snobbesses.”

“I tell you, Paul,” said Angela, earnestly, “you are half-wild. I tell you I did not even stop to dress—see,” and she opened her

cloak for a moment, and closed it laughingly. "Help me to my cab, there's a good child."

"Devil a bit," cried Mr. Chequerbent. "The Apollo dress, and you look lovely in it, and I'll smash anybody that says you don't." And before the poor girl was well aware of his purpose, he removed her cloak, threw it away, drew her arm under his, and making another dash at the door, on the other side of which a faint scream or two made it clear that he had done awful damage, he hurried her into the very centre of the room, a small boy or two being overthrown in his victorious way.

Now the Apollo dress is a very pretty one, and Angela Livingstone looked very pretty in it; but as a young lady does not generally appear at a private ball with a glittering silver tunic not quite down to her knees, and with her legs in fleshings, and with only a shoulder-strap on her arm, the sensation created, as the actress, blushing and rather terrified, was brought under the chandelier, and the room crowded round her, was not precisely favourable. The ladies glanced at her legs, and then looked indignant; and the men, when they found that Paul was the cause of the disturbance, looked more indignant than the mere spectacle would have warranted. As for Mrs. Sellinger, she never lost her presence of mind, and hastened up to the group, intending to turn the affair into a joke, and get Paul and the young lady out of the house as quickly as possible.

But before she could speak, two awkward words had reached Paul's ear. The first I will not write, because it is considered an oath, but it materially increased the force of the second, which was, "Ungentlemanly."

"Who said that?" asked Paul, looking fiercely round.

"I, sir," said a stout-built, middle-aged man, apparently a respectable tradesman, who had daughters in the room, and who probably thought they had been humiliated by breathing the same atmosphere with the pretty artist.

"Then you intend to insult this lady," said Paul, not very logically, "through me, who introduced her?"

"I have nothing to say to the *lady*," said the man, laying an impertinent stress upon the noun; "but as for you, I consider that you are neither more nor less than an offensive puppy."

There was a murmur of applause, which showed that some other people approved of this unflattering description of Paul.

Angela strove to draw him away, looked appealingly at Mrs. Sellinger, and began to cry. That settled the matter, for the next moment Paul planted so decided a one-two in the face of the last speaker that he went down with an eye that would be black in next to no time, and a nose that did not ask that brief delay for its manifestation of the vigour of the blow.

The man sprang up, and in his turn assailed Paul, who was a fair bruiser, and the battle promised to be a good one. But women screamed and men shouted, and there was a rush upon the combatants, and in ten minutes Miss Livingstone was going home crying in her cab, Paul was swearing on his way to the station-house, and Mrs. Sellinger's favourite pupils were dancing the new dance from the Black Forest.

CHAPTER XI.

A SKILLED WORKMAN LOOKS OUT A TOOL.



N the third morning after that on which Lilian Trevelyan and Bernard Carlyon had met for the first time, three persons were awaiting the arrival of the latter, in a small town a few miles from Aspen Court. The monks, who named the place Lynfield-Magna, had doubtless their own standards of admeasurement; and there are parchment records of the existence of a Lynfield-Parva, which have survived all vestiges of the latter, except that in a granary in its supposed neighbourhood, there is one wall of ecclesiastical solidity, a probable legacy from the days when churches were not vamped up by cheap contracts and sealed tenders. So Lynfield-Magna has now a solitary greatness, the components of which are a long dull street, which forks at one end into two shorter and duller ones, while, at the other end, an ugly square room, hoisted into the air on a number of piles (which the architect possibly considered to be columns), represents a town-hall, and acts as an umbrella to the market-women. The old church, at the junction of the three streets, has been so barbarously treated by its successive wardens, that its mutilated features can hardly be recognised; but it is the only object of interest in the place, and as you pace up and down its pew-cumbered aisles, you can at least exchange

the sense of stagnation which settles on you outside, for an active instinct of wrath towards those who have clogged up the arches with clumsy galleries, painted sprawling texts from the Proverbs over the walls, set up high boxes lined with green baize, and labelled with brass plates, for respectable miserable sinners, and planted narrow rickety forms, between the worst draughts, for cotton gowns and smock-frocks.

There are about a dozen good houses in the town, and it is in one of these, a stiff, red-brick building, with a highly-polished brass knocker on the door, that the group we have mentioned is assembled. The house belongs to an apothecary, whose practice is not popularly supposed to be large, but the man must be bold—bolder even than an Income-Tax Commissioner—who should venture to point out to the stout and scowling Mr. Mardyke that his establishment appears larger than his gains seem to warrant. For the present, his drawing-room, and some other parts of his house, are occupied by strangers, but as Mr. Mardyke is a childless widower, this does not interfere with his domestic arrangements.

Lilian Trevelyan is painting at a small table near one of the windows, and the fair hair would descend in a cataract upon the paper, but for a golden net-work, which holds the curls in graceful imprisonment. She is not so completely absorbed in her work as to be unable to send an occasional glance up the long street, and her position gives her a view of the road a traveller from Aspen would probably take.

Two gentlemen are in the apartment. One of them, a largely made man, in the prime of life, is lounging in an easy-chair. He is reading one of the reviews of the day. His occupation seems a careless one. Is the face careless? The features are large and exceedingly fine. You might call them sensuous, especially the mouth with its full lower lip; and the violet eye, bright as it is, might possibly turn with no unrecognising gaze upon certain good and fair things of this life; but look at the magnificent brow, round which the black, half-dishevelled locks cluster in ample folds. The massive head is almost Olympian. The beauty of that face is not a mere question of taste, but must be acknowledged on the instant of confronting it. Not that it is of the beauty which is most desirable in this common-place world, or one for which a man, emulous of ordinary successes,

would prudently barter his neater fascinations, his drawing-room effectiveness. Some women, and a good many of the other and more cowardly sex, would be afraid of that face. If the author of the review could peep from between his own lines, he would dislike that face, and not without reason. For the article is a controversial one, designed to serve the cause to which the reader is attached, and the bright violet eye is lightning into the holes in the logic, and the lip is sneering at the hackneyed phraseology. The reader is certainly sitting in the seat of the scoffer. He has been making some pencil notes, but not in the book, and possibly as memoranda for some private and unfavourable communication.

The other gentleman is seated at a side-table, with his face averted from his companions. A faint muttering occasionally escapes him, to which they are probably accustomed, for neither takes any notice of the sound. A book, apparently of devotion, is before him, but he is not reading it, and he arouses from long intervals of meditation to repeat rapidly a few scarcely audible words. He is slight and delicate in figure, with hands and feet of feminine smallness. His features are marked, the nose is aquiline, but the mouth indicates irresolution, and there is timidity legibly written in the upper portion of the face. The hair is long, and thin, and grey, but its greyness, and a stoop, manifest even while he is sitting, seem the traces of suffering rather than of age. But the strangest characteristic of his face is its utter bloodlessness. Its whiteness is startling, and troubles the eye. It resembles neither the pallor of disease, nor the sudden blanching of terror, nor the sickly hue which attests the student's vigil, but a nearer approach to the ashiness of death than we might deem that life could make, and live. A man will hardly see that appearance twice in his time, and it is well for his dreams if he do not see it once.

"So far, so bad," said the reader, throwing his book upon the table.

"How ungrateful !" replied Lilian ; "when the poor man has taken the trouble to write so many pages in the hope of pleasing you."

"*Sententiæ ponderantur, non numerantur*, Miss Trevelyan," returned the other ; "which means, in the present case, that the quality, and not the quantity, of a man's sentences are in ques-

tion, and if they are bad, like those of our friend here, it is an aggravation of his offence that they are many. Don't you agree to that?"

"I don't think that I do," said Lilian. "I have such a very great respect for anybody who can put words together in a way which makes them fit to be printed."

"That the more he puts together, the more your respect? Very well; but that is what we call in Latin a *petitio principii*, a logical mendicancy, a begging the question."

"Latin twice in two minutes," said the young lady, laughing; "unless the first was Greek. I will not be talked to in that manner. I have read, somewhere, that somebody who was very clever, mind, declared that what could not be said in English was not worth saying at all. Please to remember that, Mr. Heywood."

"Why, yes. Somebody spoke safely enough, considering what English is, and how little entitled it is to be regarded as a distinct language."

"On the contrary," said Lilian, "I will show you that it can be very distinct indeed, if you persist in debating everything with me. Why don't you sometimes agree to what people say?"

"Why don't people sometimes say what I can agree to?" answered Mr. Heywood. "Besides," he added, with a singular intonation of his rich, pleasing voice, "if I were too assenting, who knows but that I might be taken for a Jesuit, aiming at some ultimate object, and in the meantime striving, by my silkiness, to ingratiate myself with my tools and victims? That would be very sad, you know."

Lilian looked at him earnestly for a moment or two, but made no reply.

"It is a wonder," he said, after a pause, "that your conquering hero is so long in coming. You wrote, that after twelve o'clock you should be happy to see him, and I am surprised that he makes you wait for your happiness."

"He will be here, I have no doubt," said Lilian, colouring, but speaking in a calm grave tone. "I wish that I had as little doubt as to—as to—" She hesitated, and bent over her work.

"It is my duty to remove any doubts you may entertain,

Miss Trevelyan," said Mr. Heywood, drily. "I rather hoped that I had already done so, but I see that I underrated the power of another influence, upon which we had none of us calculated three days ago."

This time Lilian's fair face became crimson. But when she raised it, and met the keen gaze of her companion, she answered courageously enough,—

"I thought we understood—no, I mean that it was agreed between us, that this subject was to be spoken of in one way only. That my duty was to be pointed out, and that I was to hear nothing but what related to *that*, and to my fulfilment of it. Is this the way in which you mean to treat me?"

"You can hardly forget to whom you speak, Lilian," replied Mr. Heywood, with displeasure.

"Had I forgotten, do you think I should remain to speak?" returned Lilian, with firmness.

That firmness was probably new to her. At any rate Heywood looked at her with that species of interest one might feel in watching the solution of a problem. He gazed for some moments, and then, as if he had made up his mind as to the character of some process which had taken place before him, he slightly nodded, and said, with a smile,—

"*Quod erat demonstrandum*. Rely upon my not annoying you again."

She understood him, or thought she did, for she once more flushed over cheek and forehead, but she made no further answer.

"I think this Mr. Carlyon must remain with us during the day," said Mr. Heywood. "I should like him to dine with us. By the evening, I shall be able to see our course. Remember, please, that what I chiefly want to ascertain is, whether he has ambition."

"You visited his employer, I thought," said Lilian, "in order to understand his character?"

"I did, and for a better reason still, namely, to see whether enough could not be done with Molesworth himself to make his subordinate services unnecessary. I do not think that I did my work badly, or that I left a point untouched where I could touch without danger. But as to the Wilmslows, he was so guarded that he only revealed to me that there must be something to

guard, or he would have been more open. And as to Mr. Carlyon, though my companion took a very good story with him, which passed with Molesworth, he spoke as slightly as one would expect a lawyer to do about so unimportant a person as one of his *employés*. In short, we did little, except convincing ourselves that there is something wrong ; and the first use we make of Carlyon is, to discover what this something is."

"And the next?" asked Lilian.

"Depends upon Mr. Carlyon himself ; and," he added, as if urging the thought as likely to please his companion, "it may be very greatly to his advantage, as advertisers say."

"It is doing what is right," said Lilian, but repeating the words as if they were a form.

"It is doing what is right," repeated Mr. Heywood, earnestly and authoritatively : "and it is also a merciful and happy providence that we are enabled to achieve this good work without recourse to any agency but that which is honourable. I do not mean, of course, that there can be real dishonour in any act which promotes the welfare of the church, but she does not always call upon us to sacrifice even our worldlier feelings for her service, but more often invites us to baptize them into, and consecrate them to, that service."

And at that moment Lilian's blue eyes sparkled, and Heywood, observing her, felt that she had made out the approaching figure of Bernard. But he wisely abstained from reminding her to apply the lesson of his last words to the sentiment of joy the sight had caused her, for he knew enough of the Mysteries to be certain that the girl's heart was justifying its own delight without the aid of his theology. One of Heywood's manifold accomplishments was, the knowing when to hold his tongue.

Carlyon, having stabled his horse at one of the two very bad inns of Lynfield, hastened to present himself at Mr. Mardye's house. He was welcomed by Lilian, who presented him to Mr. Heywood.

In an instant, the buoyant spirits, with which Bernard had ridden, somewhat hard, to the little town, were dashed and chilled. That magnificent-looking stranger, obviously on terms of intimacy with the family! When we have once committed the indiscretion of placing our happiness in the keeping of another, how suspicious we are of the trustee we have chosen.

The cloud of trouble which came over Carlyon's heart must in some degree have shadowed his face, for Heywood turned to Lilian with a smile, and after a moment said,—

"We poor Catholics are jealous of our titles, you know, Mr. Carlyon—the Reverend Cyprian Heywood has the pleasure of making your acquaintance!"

And Catholic clergymen do not marry; and what a glow of pleasure came upon Bernard's forehead! and how cordially he shook the hand Mr. Heywood held out to him—the latter reading the whole *historiette* as plainly as it is set down here. The pale gentleman then came forward a few steps.

"My uncle, Mr. Eustace Trevelyan!" said Lilian.

The ashy-looking uncle took both Carlyon's hands in his own, and in earnest, but broken sentences, warmly thanked him for his intervention in behalf of Miss Trevelyan. He then looked doubtfully at Bernard, as if anxious to know whether he thought sufficient acknowledgment had been made, and seemed hesitating whether he ought not to recommence his thanks. But as Carlyon, after a brief reply, addressed himself to Lilian, the nervous man appeared relieved, and returned to his table by the wall. And so Bernard made the acquaintance of the "strange persons" whom Lilian promised he should see.

Incalculable are the advantages a French author enjoys over an English one. Among them, and not the least, is the amiable patience with which a not proverbially patient people allows its novelists unrestricted time and space to tell their stories. A hundred pages of dialogue, more or less, are nothing to a French *raconteur*, and to a story-teller who does not wish to be egotistic, and likes to set his characters talking, instead of himself talking about them, nothing can be pleasanter than making dialogue. Oh! for the good days of Sir Charles Grandison, and the interminable conversations in that oak parlour. But those days are gone, and stories are expected to make some little progress now and then. But for this oppressive tax upon free speech, what a number of things Mr. Carlyon should have said this day; nor should Mr. Heywood's artfulness have been inarticulate, nor Miss Trevelyan have been more silent than becomes a young maiden. But we have much work before us.

The stars were looking into the Severn when Bernard returned to Aspen. It was a bright, clear, cold night, and they sparkled

and twinkled with all their might. I think Bernard looked at the stars a good deal, but I doubt whether he saw them.

He had gone through the intended ordeal well,—the better, perhaps, that he had not been for a moment on his guard, and had only thought of his happiness in finding himself passing hour after hour in the company of Lilian Trevelyan. The priest had exerted his marvellous powers of pleasing, and while apparently contributing only a handsome share to a varied and animated conversation, had in reality put the mind of Carlyon through its paces, and formed a plausible estimate of its powers. He found an intellect, of the order which is too ready (according to some profound persons) to be great, but singularly practical. He found scholarship, graceful, but superficial, and the better adapted, perhaps, to the uses of the world than a sounder learning. He found fluent speech, some wit, and much facility of self-adaptation to circumstances. And then he addressed himself to the moral nature of Carlyon—and was baffled. Not that Bernard affected concealment, or dreamed of the scrutiny he was undergoing. But there was a disturbing agency (like that of the undiscovered planet whose influence was felt in the calculations) which set that nature away from its ordinary tracks and channels, and, for the moment, enabled it to defy the analyser. It was Lilian Trevelyan who came between her spiritual friend and his aim. Bernard might be proud, might be revengeful, might be ambitious, or might be none of these ; but all that the priest could with certainty decide was, that Bernard loved, and on this he had decided very early in their interview. It would be necessary to apply some stronger tests, and it was on these, while Carlyon, on his homeward road, with a full and an untranquil heart, was weighing hopes and fears, and chances in scales which he held all unsteadily, that Heywood was meditating. And the plotter had fallen asleep long before the lover had merged the blue of Lilian's eyes in the dull grey of the dream light.

CHAPTER XII.

LILIAN TREVELYAN'S INVALUABLE GUARDIAN.



THE following day Carlyon strolled out for a solitary walk (rather to the discontent of the young ladies at Aspen), and for a reason which any young gentleman who has ever fancied himself in love will possibly appreciate, he walked in the direction of Lynfield, though he had not the least intention of visiting that interesting town. A couple of miles from Aspen Court he met Heywood, who was also walking, and apparently intent on a book.

"Ah, Mr. Carlyon, I am very glad to have met you. I see," he said, looking round, "that my friend here has beguiled me into extending my walk most unreasonably, and it is fortunate that you have stopped me."

"Do they write such engrossing books?" said Bernard. "I never get hold of them."

"No, the art has gone out," replied the clergyman; "but this book has been doing its work for three hundred years and more. You will think it anything but a clerical handbook, I suppose." And he held the open volume to Carlyon.

"Rabelais. Ah! I understand your overlooking the milestones."

"Is he not glorious? I was just reading Friar John's encouragement of his friends when they were going to battle with Picrochole. He tells them that he fears nothing but the great ordnance; yet he knows of a charm, taught him by a subsexton, that will preserve a man from the violence of guns, and all manner of fire-weapons and engines, but, he adds, 'it will do me no good, because I do not believe in it.'"

"The philosophy of the failure of a good many specifics in this world," said Carlyon; "from beneficent legislation up to—what shall we say—galvanic rings."

"It is true," said the priest; "and yet let me give you a piece of advice, which you need not be afraid to take even from a designing Papist like me. It is early in life for *you* to be severe upon the world, and you will get through it better by an occa-

sional bow to its idols—at present at least. For if a very young man laughs at them, the kindly judging world will say, not that it is because he has eyes, but because he could never get near enough to the pedestal to join in the rites. Don't be incensed—you are five-and-twenty or so—I am forty, and I have lived in my time."

Bernard here judged it proper to inquire after his host of the preceding day—and indeed his host's daughter.

"Oh! very well, and delighted with you. You must come over again when the Miss Wilmslows can spare you. By the way, I am doubly glad we have met this morning, for I had thought of asking you a question, one that affects Miss Trevelyan. Perhaps, though, it is asking you to do an unprofessional thing in giving some advice to your defeated antagonists."

"Pray make me useful," said Carlyon, mentally trampling all etiquette into the lowest contempt.

"Why," said the priest, "it is not of much importance, but one likes to be right. It is this—I speak of course in confidence. Let me plunge at once *in medias res*. When the young lady we speak of was an heiress—before your friends deprived her of the title—she received, as you may suppose, many proposals."

What possible right had Carlyon to begin to feel so exceedingly sick at heart! Was it not most natural that a young and beautiful girl should have such offers? So he admitted, and then remembered that she had not accepted any of them, and he felt a most unjustifiable comfort in reflecting that she was no longer rich. Who says that love softens the heart? He made a sort of assent, intimating to Heywood to go on, but the latter thought it was rather a curious sound.

"Her circumstances having altered, of course any such negotiation terminates, *ipso facto*, unless renewed. Now of two gentlemen who might have been considered to be pretty equally eligible, any preference on the lady's part set aside, one, a friend of my own, has entrusted me with such a renewal, couched in the most graceful terms, and really a creditable offer. He is a man of fortune, an educated person, and otherwise calculated, I think, to make Lilian happy. I have reason to know that she has a considerable regard for him, and I suppose this will be the marriage. Now, Mr. Carlyon—by the way, how white you

look ! Do you know, I think that you London men over-exert yourselves when you come into the country, and the change of air upsets you."

"There is—there may be something in that," said poor Bernard hastily ; "I have been riding a good deal—but it is nothing—pray go on."

"Ah ! and you ride hard too. Miss Trevelyan remarked yesterday, when you came in, that you looked flushed, as if from a gallop." And he continued to watch Carlyon, who was conscious of changing colour two or three times under the other's gaze.

"I shall be more careful in future," said Bernard, with an effort. "But what is your inquiry?"

"Why this," said Heywood, "for I am in—I will not say a delicate, but a double position. This gentleman is, as I have said, my friend, and I would gladly promote a marriage upon which he has set his heart. On the other hand, I am still more bound, for reasons with which I need not trouble you now, to take care of the interests of Lilian Trevelyan. Of course we shall employ lawyers to do that which, in this happy country lawyers only can do ; but, in the first place, there are two or three points for consideration. I have no doubt that, with your knowledge and practical habits, you will put me right in a minute."

Carlyon only trusted himself with another slight assent.

"This lover of Lilian's," said Heywood, possibly choosing his words, "though rich, is unfortunately placed in certain circumstances, which, though in no way affecting his honour, would be exceedingly disadvantageous to his interests were they known. And—I speak to you, again, in the utmost confidence—they are so apparently—shall I say suspicious, that if Lilian herself——"

"One word, Mr. Heywood," said Bernard, "and you will forgive the interruption when you understand its reason. I must not hear the circumstances you were about to mention."

"I have to beg *your* forgiveness, sir," said the priest, with the instant and haughty humility of a man of the world. "I understand you. I had ventured to rely on your assurance a few minutes ago that you were willing to be useful. I *am* trenching, it appears, on professional etiquette—my ignorance

is my only excuse." He raised his hand to his hat, as if about to terminate the interview, when Bernard replied quietly, for he had been for some time striving to master himself, and the little personality assisted him.

"You *do* understand me, Mr. Heywood. I repeat that I shall most gladly be of any service to Miss Trevelyan. But there is a reason why I ought not clandestinely to become possessed of information with which I might, as I gather from your statement, materially damage the interests of a suitor for Miss Trevelyan's hand."

Heywood's bold, keen glance was turned full upon the face of Carlyon, but it was met by a gaze as bold and searching as his own. For Bernard, after the first shock of Heywood's communication was over, had learned, either from an unguarded look, or from an over-acted passage—a word will suffice where the faculties are so painfully sharpened—that the priest knew his secret.

"You had better speak plainly, Mr. Carlyon," replied Heywood, who knew, in his turn, that both masks had fallen.

"I have done so," said Carlyon. "And I do not know that I ought to say another word."

"I am a plain man, sir," said the priest, "and I like straightforward dealing, and, therefore, if you will not speak out, I will. An attorney has sent his clerk to be a sort of man in possession at Aspen Court, and that attorney's clerk has done Miss Trevelyan, a beautiful young lady, of one of the best families in England, the honour to regard her with favour, and, like a chivalrous rival, declines to hear anything against a *millionnaire* who intends to marry her."

"How utterly unworthy I should be of the hopes I entertain," said Bernard, with an unmoved voice and a calm smile, "could I feel ashamed, even for a second, by your high-minded taunts! Can you borrow nothing stronger than that from your friend Rabelais? He was a master of vituperation, but would hardly have found a sting in charging a gentleman with having raised his eyes something higher than his fortunes, before raising his fortunes to the height he designed."

"A neat speech, and well spoken," said Heywood, "and one which sounds like a scrap from a sentimental comedy. Perhaps you write for the stage? At all events, accept my applause. I

have not the slightest right to go further, and to ask Mr. Bernard Carlyon whether, as a practical man, he has any reason, the least, for anticipating the accomplishment of his ambition."

"Mr. Heywood," said Bernard, "we are speaking under curious circumstances. I interrupted you in a story which probably you introduced in order to be interrupted, and a certain inference, which I have not contradicted, naturally resulted. But——"

"My dear young friend," said Heywood, "you are clearly destined for the House of Commons, and will do well to reserve these phrases for the honourable and learned gentlemen opposite, who may slightly misapprehend you, and so forth. You profess love for Miss Lilian Trevelyan; you are speaking to her best and most trusted friend, who invites you to speak out."

"I have great respect for Miss Trevelyan's friend," said Bernard, "who was determined not to be driven, "but I have no right to suppose that he is mine."

"That is the first sensible word I have heard from you," said Heywood, good-naturedly; "and it deserves to be met with frankness. Lilian Trevelyan is everything to me, and all my friendships and enmities (if enmities were proper) must connect themselves with her welfare. That is plain speaking. Now for yourself. I like you; and I do not think it impossible that, with opportunities, Miss Trevelyan might ultimately be brought to a similar admission—though you need not flush up to your eyes in that manner. And as I was rude just now, I ought to say, though as a man of sense you are already sure of it, that the mere accident of your learning the law in an office, instead of yawning over it in chambers, is, with me, a circumstance in your favour, rather than against you. There is a man who will, one of these days, be a cabinet minister, who was, no very long time ago, holding your place in a solicitor's house in the city. But I do not intend that Miss Lilian Trevelyan shall be a lawyer's wife. *Meliora canamus*, Mr. Carlyon."

"I am indebted to you for having said so much," replied Bernard; "and it makes me quite sure that you mean to say more."

"Very little more, for you must speak now, or ever hereafter hold your peace on this subject. I have told you my position with regard to Miss Trevelyan, and as you have spent a day with us, I imagine you have convinced yourself that I have described

it aright. So I speak with some authority. Have you any private fortune, or expectations of one?"

"I have no private fortune," said Carlyon. "It is not worth while talking of my expectations."

"I see what you mean," replied the priest. "Well, you must be near the expiration of your engagement to Mr. Molesworth. Is he going to take you into partnership?"

"There is no reason for my expecting such an offer," replied Bernard; "and were it made, I should decline it."

"Decline a share in a capital business, which produces some six or seven thousand a-year, I am told?"

"As you seem interested in the house, there is no objection to my telling you that your estimate is under the mark," said Carlyon; "and that were Mr. Molesworth's great energies supported by those of a working partner——"

"Such as you would make, instead of the gentleman who keeps bears and lynxes at Sydenham?"

"Just so," said Bernard, smiling at this fresh proof of Heywood's acquaintance with the subject; "but such as it is not my ambition to make."

"Come, you have ambition then; that is something. I was afraid that you had none, and were content to grovel on, filing, and demurring, and endorsing, and attesting, and declaring, and excepting, and vouching, and muddling, until you could sit down with a good balance at your banker's, and complacently meditate on the noble and useful practice in which you had passed life."

"Let me compliment you on having picked up the mantle of Rabelais, and on its excellent fit," said Bernard.

"And I compliment you on your self-command, and I am glad to think that the loss of Miss Trevelyan will not break your heart," returned the other. "And now, we may as well understand one another. In a spirit of kindness towards you, I have invited your explanations, and you refuse them, probably thinking that I am a mere interloper, and designing to address yourself directly to the young lady. But you do not know the family in question, or its habits. Come over to Lynfield and make your proposals, and you will be at once referred to me for a decisive and final answer. You might have saved yourself trouble by an explanation on the spot, but that is your affair. Meantime, I

was requested by Miss Trevelyan, should I accidentally meet you, to request the return of a chain of hers, which you forgot to mention yesterday. I believe that I see it—very thoughtful of you to wear it yourself, to ensure its safety, but let me release you from the charge.”

Now this was a mere guess of Heywood's, for he could not see the carefully guarded chain, but the shot told.

“Mr. Heywood,” said Bernard, after a pause, “I suppose I may believe that such a conversation as we have had would hardly have taken place, if you had not some reason for carrying it further. I will imitate your plain speech, and say I am convinced that I can be of some service to you.”

“Well, Mr. Carlyon, admitting that you can be of service—not to me—but to the family to which I am attached, are you willing to be so?”

“The question is hardly one which you need ask.”

“The Trevelyans are not ungrateful, and whatever you may do for them will be overpaid. I use the word deliberately, because I know that you will approve it. But still, the service required is a large one.”

“I am not afraid to hear what it is,” said Carlyon.

“Then, listen. Your house has taken away Aspen Court from Lilian Trevelyan. Will you do your utmost to restore it to her?”

This speech certainly made Bernard start, and not without reason. It sounded like one of those audacious things which people say so coolly to us in dreams, and which we hear and answer with so much composure,—but, then, Carlyon had the disadvantage of being awake. He turned a bewildered eye upon his companion, as if to ask him to repeat his words. Heywood left him no time for discussion.

“Of course,” he said, “this is not a question to be answered in an instant. Give it full consideration. Only understand, that those who make it, perfectly comprehend your position, and the amount of means you possess for carrying out their object. Do not imagine that they suppose they are negotiating with a mere tool. Understand this; and, also, that he who leads Miss Trevelyan to Aspen as its heiress, leads her there as his wife.”

He spoke, at last, in the tone which carries conviction of the

sincerity and good faith of the speaker, and he took Bernard's hand,—

"I have set a prize before you, but it is set high. If your heart fails you, there is no shame in the matter, and I dare say you may make a very good solicitor, and lead a quiet and prosperous life without Lilian Trevelyan. But if you choose the other course, and dare venture for Aspen, you will be well backed by those who can be good friends to their friend. And now, not another word. Come over to Lynfield the day after to-morrow. And should you decline to aid us, I will spare you all troublesome explanation. If I see you return Miss Trevelyan's chain, I shall understand that this conversation is forgotten. And now, good day."

He shook Bernard's hand kindly, and walked away.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE OWL AND THE KITTENS.



HARLES, EARL OF ROOKBURY, attained his majority in the year of Lord Nelson's funeral. Public attention was called to the fact by the young Earl himself, who, having entertained a select party upon the evening of the solemn ceremonial, and having got outrageously tipsy, as was not unusual with the territorial aristocracy in the year 1806, did sally forth with some companions, and, from the top of a hackney-coach, did laudably essay to dry the tears of the weeping metropolis, by assuring the crowds that he should take his seat in the Lords in a very few weeks, and though Nelson was gone, he, Charles of Rookbury, would watch over the country and the constitution. His friends hurried this heroic declaration, but the mob did not see the fun, pulled the party from the coach, near the King's Mews, and handled them almost as roughly as the paragraph-mongers did for some days afterwards. But Lord Rookbury, though unluckily notorious, for some time, for this unseemly outbreak, had done, and could do, even better things than drinking claret and publishing the fact.

He came, after a long minority, to an ample and well-nursed estate, and having distinguished himself at college, was, as usual

expected to distinguish himself in public life. As usual, too, he disappointed expectations founded on that basis. Lord Rookbury's family friends were chiefly Tories, which was perhaps a sufficient reason for the young lord—who always held that relations were a mistake—taking the other side. However, though he eschewed his native benches, he would not be naturalized on those opposite, and early gave evidence of the self-will, or independence, as he preferred to call it, which marked him through life. Of course, the Court and Carlton blandishments were alike tried upon the wealthy young nobleman, but while he could be made to like neither the king's wit nor the queen's snuff, he was also proof to the virtuous Dauphin, and the vocal Morris. It was soon found that Lord Rookbury could not be "had." But he attended in his place very regularly, and often made a brief smart speech, full of sarcasm, and designed to show both sides that they were incapable of going to the bottom of the question. The latter half of his address generally overthrew the argument of the former, and his practical commentary on both halves was going away without voting at all. Even as a young man, recently printed diaries have shown that Lord Rookbury sometimes set older lords thinking, when they had only intended dividing.

Time passed, so did Percevals, Liverpools, and Cannings ; and Lord Rookbury's nature continued to isolate itself. He read much ; he thought deeply ; and he did nothing. The brief keen speeches still flashed out amid the common-place of the house, and everybody listened ; but rising men felt, that though they might fear Rookbury's sarcasms, they need not fear his competition ; and that is a thought which mightily consoles some of your rising men. And others who had risen, and could afford to be pleased when they liked, internally regretted that Rookbury had been too rich to be put into harness, or something might have been made of him, had he been duly bitted. It was even hinted that in reform times, the great Earl Chimborazo, high-throned all height above, had looked down from his inaccessible mountain, round which he haughtily permitted the world to revolve, and had indicated one of the lower peaks as a station for Rookbury. But he refused it, and even lived. That Earl passed, and was succeeded, and again Rookbury might have had office. He was perhaps a thought nearer to it now than ever in his life,

for though the new premier's jovial laugh was unlike Rookbury's taunting gibe, the men had something akin in their common scorn of humbug. But it was too late, at least so Lord Rookbury thought, and it was decidedly so when Sir Robert and Lord John began alternately to mount guard, relieving one another at intervals. Rookbury was too old for drill. When, in 1846, Lord John came in on his five years' repairing lease, Lord Rookbury was sixty-one. There is a trifle to add yet, before he arrives at Aspen Court.

It has not been mentioned, Lord Rookbury seldom mentioned it himself, and never among his friends, that he married. Nobody exactly knew why, but so many of Lord Rookbury's acts were incomprehensible. He was proud of his descent. Lady Rookbury's father was a tea-dealer. He liked beauty. The Countess was short, hungry-looking, and had high cheek-bones. And though Rookbury did not admire virtue, or set the slightest example thereof, he conceived it desirable in a peeress; and this made it the more strange that he should marry a widow whose Cheltenham interval had been talked about. There was some money, but not enough to be any object to his lordship—at least so people said, judging from his rental and the large sums he spent on his own amusements. However, they married, and lived decorously enough at Rookton Woods and in Acheron Square for four years, when the Countess of Rookbury, having presented the Earl with an heir, became dissatisfied with the Court physicians and called in a homœopathist. Being thus left a widower, Lord Rookbury announced, to prevent trouble to the mothers of families—for he was a very gentlemanly man—that little Viscount Dawton was not to have a step-mamma. And having himself been sent to Eton and Oxford, he sent Dawton to Harrow and Cambridge, at which latter seat of polite learning and true religion the heir of Rookton Woods was beating bargees when our story began.

So far I have stated nothing against Lord Rookbury. He was an exceedingly clever person, shrewd, audacious, and sarcastic, with ample means, and plenty of will. Also, let us give him his further due. He was a finished gentleman in manners, incapable of coarseness, except under strong provocations, and remarkably pleasant in the society of women. At the time we speak of, his tall figure, thin almost to fragility, but upright as a column, had

not stiffened with age. His small, well-made head was perfectly bald. Wrinkles had reluctantly intruded to disturb the delicate Saxon features ; and perhaps the habitual doubt—I do not like to write distrust,—which marked the old man's face, had aided to deepen the lines near the mouth. The cold blue eye was undimmed, and the teeth were white and perfect. Carefully, but not foppishly dressed, and bearing himself loftily and well, Lord Rookbury looked an excellent type of the English gentleman of rank, and when foreigners came to hear the debates in the Lords, they always marked him out as somebody, and were surprised to be told (by officials) that he was—"O, nobody particular—a peer." And by this time men with not a twentieth part of Rookbury's talent, had learned to speak of him as a mere crotcheter, and even to pity him as possibly a little cracked.

I am afraid that I must not let him down so easily. He was a sad old reprobate,—and there you have it in half a line. A fine classical scholar, he wrote Latin verses as good as Lord Wellesley's, but all the purity was in the style. He liked Juvenal, which was odd, for that uncompromising gentleman lashes avarice, fraud, and luxury, and Lord Rookbury practised all three. Chiefly, you would wonder that a man who looked so well, and spoke so boldly, was a downright cheat. And yet he was one. I do not think he exactly loved money for its own sake, and he would certainly spend it unhesitatingly in the gratification either of a pleasure or a vengeance, but he liked to take advantage of everybody. It was curiously developed, this passion for "getting the pull," as he called it ; and he would make private sacrifices that the world might see him a winner. During part of his life he took to the turf ; and more than one person now lives virtuously on the pension Lord Rookbury bestowed as a reward for taking the public shame of a daring turf-swindle, contrived by himself. You cannot cheat much at whist in England, but at *écarté*, in his own house, Lord Rookbury managed to win so wonderfully from a French gentleman, who knew himself to be of the first force, that the latter insisted on moving the table. There were looking-glasses in the room, by the way, and somehow Lord Rookbury not only won no more, but thought it well to return his past winnings.

Rookton Woods, his seat, was in the same county with Aspen Court, but nearly at the other end of it. We are not going thither

at present. Parliament was up for the Easter holidays, and Lord Rookbury had gone home. There had been some frosts, to the great wrath of the hunting-men, but the open day had come at last, and the Z. P. H. having met at Smudgington Bottom, and found, the fields around that moist retreat were soon studded with riderless horses, and horseless ex-riders. Lord Rookbury, who rode well to hounds, had been punctual at cover-side, and had shamed younger men by his management and boldness up to the first check. But while the old dog-fox was being extracted from the willow-copse near Blashtree End, which is about four miles, as the crow flies, from Aspen Court, a thought suddenly struck the Earl of Rookbury, and he was seen no more in that day's hunt. Soon afterwards the fox gallantly broke away at the other end of the wood, and after going to the right to Ankelow Butts, and over Bobchurch Hill, and so by Jobbins's farm and the Leasowes, took the left across the Hazleby road and the railway, where there was another check. But the hounds picked him up, and he went steadily over the downs to Grigs's Gorse, and thence by Low Whacks to Bibbington, and was finally run into within a hundred yards from the Three Blind Ducks, Sluice Common, after a fine run of an hour and ten minutes.

Lord Rookbury, who knew every inch of the country, having cleared himself from the hunt, set his horse's head straight for Aspen Court, and according to his custom, when he was bent on an object, lost very little time in getting there. He gave a glance at his perfect tops, and was gratified to find that he was scarcely splashed, and for the rest he knew that his costume was faultless. Even between sixty and seventy it is well to be tidy when one calls upon ladies, and Lord Rookbury was looking exceedingly well. He rode up to the door, which stood wide open, and began to hammer with his whip-handle. After some battering, the red-armed Martha appeared, and immediately began to curtsy to horse and rider, with her usual industry.

Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Wilmslow was at home.

"Out for a drive, I suppose?" said the Earl.

"Naw, sir," said Martha, eager not to be misunderstood.

"Mr. Wilmslow out with the hounds, eh? I didn't see him."

"Naw, sir, naw," said Martha.

"But he's not here, you say, girl?"

"Naw, sir, I dint say so. But he don't want to see you, and he knows what you've come for."

"Does he?" said the Earl. "Then he knows a little more than I do myself."

"You be after no good," continued the faithful Martha, "and sooner you be off, better we be pleased."

It is impossible to say precisely what passed through the Earl's mind at this notification of his supposed intentions, but he made a most remarkable face at the rosy Martha, and then taking out his card-case he endeavoured to hand a card to that uncompromising person. But she put her great hands behind her.

"I shan't take none of your papers, naw. It's just as master thought, and you may keep it to yourself."

"Don't be such a fool, girl," said Lord Rookbury, ceasing to be amused, and suddenly looking very black indeed. "Take that card to Mr. Wilmslow, who is under some mistake about me, and then let me hear his answer. Do you hear?" he said, hastily dismounting, and entering the hall.

Noblesse oblige, in more senses than one, especially in this country. And at any rate it was not such a person as poor Martha, who could be expected to resist that dark scowl and thunderous command. But she resolved to compromise between her fears and her duty, and so taking the card with some tremor, she hastily made off with it into the lower regions of the house, and far enough away from the smoking-room, whence, indeed, Wilmslow had espied Lord Rookbury, and having been seized with one of his old terrors of legal invasion, had issued the sternest orders that he was not to be visible.

Throwing his rein over a hook at the door, the Earl walked about the hall for some time, and might have been walking there up to this present writing, for any step Martha would have taken to abridge his exercise. He pictured to himself Martha returning to her master with the card—the horror of that master at finding that he had sent an offensive message to one of the leading aristocrats of his county, who had honoured him with a visit of congratulation on recovering his estate; and he went on to imagine Wilmslow hastily dressing himself, and preparing a speech of apologies; and his lordship even proceeded to arrange a pleasant little joking reply, which should set the penitent at his ease. All this was very well in theory, but practically beside

the mark, inasmuch as the Rookton Woods card, with a large black smear on front and back, from the thumb and finger of the good Martha, was safely stuck between the spikes of a save-all on the kitchen mantel-piece, the damsel intending that it should there remain until her mistress returned; and inasmuch as Mr. Wilmslow, having bitten his cigar through, in his irritation, was pacing the passages in a high state of wrath and uncertainty, and wondering why the fellow below did not go, and whether he had not better secrete himself in one of the distant rooms, until his wife or Carlyon (both of whom he heartily cursed for being away) should return to confront the supposed enemy.

Lord Rookbury waited a very long time, long enough, he said to himself, for Wilmslow to have put himself into full court costume, and studied a perfect oration. And then he began to think that he was really being insulted, and dark thoughts entered into his head. He was on the point of leaving the house in a rage, when some light voices, and some merry laughter, came pleasantly on his ear. His face became quite radiant. He crossed the hall, which he knew well, and listening for a moment, found that the voices were in the garden.

The fine day, which had opened the hunting, had been as welcome to the young ladies at Aspen as to the mighty hunters of the Z. P. H. It was a good day for bringing out poor little Amy, and in causing that pretty little field-marshal to review all the household troops of pets which her sisters had enlisted during her illness. And when Lord Rookbury entered the garden, the old nobleman thought that a very pretty group was before him; and as he had a keen eye for beauty, it may be presumed that he was right. Mention hath been made of an old tree, in the hole of which lived a lean cat, herself inaccessible to the civilizing advances of the girls, but who did not object to her kittens being patronised and instructed (just as some trustless and blaspheming she-Pariah, scowling from behind her short black pipe at her hovel-door, will snarl and scoff at the ladies from the visiting-committee, with their tracts and soup, but will yet send her brats to the infant-school), and who upon the present occasion was at home. A stool had been brought for Amy, who was carefully shawled, and deposited before the tree, and the tame fawn was placed in her arms, that they might keep one another warm, as Kate thoughtfully

observed. The owl had been brought out, not much to his satisfaction, and was perched on a garden-chair, blinking mightily in the sunshine. The rabbits were on the grass, munching, and shaking their ears, and occasionally performing violent and convulsive jumps, throwing themselves into the air, without any obvious cause for such feats. Emma was holding one of the ring-doves on her finger, and laying one or two of her glossy brown curls across the bird as she caressed it. And Kate, having climbed upon a large garden-basket, which she had reversed for the purpose, was withdrawing the old cat's kittens one by one for exhibition, a measure wistfully regarded by that matron, though on the whole she appeared to have a general confidence in the administration. Three of the kittens were already on the grass before Emma. The three girls were looking happy and laughing merrily as Lord Rookbury advanced.

He raised his hat, and smiled with great urbanity upon the group, as he gazed from one to the other. By a curious coincidence, the owl on the chair just then opened his eyes very wide, and gazed with considerable interest upon the three plump kittens on the grass.

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. CHEQUERBENT AT THE BAR OF JUSTICE.



HE chivalrous and captive Paul raged vehemently as he was conducted to the police-station, and lost no opportunity of conveying to the police, and to such other audience as accumulated around the procession, his unhesitating opinion that of all the miscreants permitted to encumber the earth, a full-blown tradesman was at once the most offensive and the most despicable. His guardians rather evaded than exhausted the question by good-natured advice not to make a fool of himself, and the party soon reached the station, where the public was abruptly dismissed, the charge taken down, and Mr. Chequerbent locked up.

A gentleman with money in his pocket, and a little tact, has not much to apprehend from the severity of the police force. So, as soon as Paul had sobered himself, and resolved upon a plan of action, his request to be let out, that he might say a few

words, was very favourably listened to. There happened to be no other criminal in the station, so the inspector felt the less restraint in offering Paul a seat by the fire, and the conversation became friendly enough. During the discussion which preceded Mr. Chequerbent's removal from the dancing-academy, Mrs. Sellinger, thoughtful amid her annoyance, had fetched him his *paletot*. Luckily his cigar-case was in his pocket, and his explanation that he was ordered to smoke a good deal on account of neuralgic bronchitis in the vascular ventricle, was humanely considered by the official, who having himself an hereditary tendency to the same complaint, did not refuse to share the remedy. And, in short, for a night in a police-station, Paul got through the hours pleasantly enough, and heard some profitable discourse, from which he may have learned, among other things, how little chance an accused person has of escaping from justice, when her inferior ministers have sufficient confidence in one another's honour and veracity to support one another by any confirmation the rules of evidence demand.

In the morning Paul had a tolerable breakfast brought him, and he had scarcely finished it when a lady arrived to see him. It is needless to say that this was poor Angela, who had already been to Mrs. Sellinger's, and who brought a selection, from Paul's carpet-bag, of everything he would want for a morning toilet. Angry was agreeably astonished to see him come out to her with his usual laugh. She had half expected to hear his fetters come clanking along, like the husband's in *Fidelio*. And she had scarcely a word of scolding for him, but was eager to go anywhere, and see anybody, and do anything in the world, after the manner of our beloved ones when we really want their assistance. She proposed to visit Paul's antagonist, and to try and soften him ; but this Paul would not hear of. He admitted that he had behaved rather badly, and he meant to offer the fellow an apology himself (though his insolence showed that he was a mere hound, who deserved all he had got), but Angela should not go near him. What did Mrs. Sellinger say? Angela had looked into her room,—she was of course in bed, for the fellow had gone on until nearly six—but she sent her love to Mr. Chequerbent, and though she had tried in vain to mollify the man he had beaten, whose name was Shaddles, and who was a sort of miscellaneous grocer in the neighbourhood, she had written a

note to the reporter who usually attended the police-court (whose daughter she had once taught), and had begged him to suppress the story for the papers. This piece of kind thoughtfulness, when she had good right to sulk, proved, Paul declared, that the handsome dancing mistress was a most amicable party.

Paul then began to consider whether he had better defend himself by counsel, and he thought of two or three barristers, just called, who had eaten many oysters and applauded many Adelphi performances with him, and any one of whom would have cheerfully come up to Clerkenwell, and harangued the magistrate in his favour, citing every precedent of a combat from Moses and the Egyptian down to the last members of Parliament who fought for a cab. But the friendly inspector dissuaded him from this course, as inimical to his own interests, summing up his reasons in a terse whisper—

“The beaks hate tongue. Eh?”

Yielding to this suggestion and strictly inhibiting Miss Livingstone from any attempt upon the plebeian Shaddles, Paul dismissed her with his benediction, and arranging that they should meet in court. So the little actress went away somewhat comforted at Paul's cheerfulness, but still in awful terror at the thoughts of the vengeance which she felt assured would be launched upon him from the magisterial bench. She determined to be near him during what she chose to think his “trial,” and to console him in the dark hour of doom, and although I do not suppose her line of reading had ever made her acquainted with that sweet saint who sat by Russell's side, she instinctively resolved on a similar course of devotion. Nay, she resolved on more. With an energetic step, she hastened to the nearest stationer's, where she bought a very fine card embossed with roses and wreaths, and upon which, with a very scratchy steel pen, she inscribed her name, not over legibly, for her education had been a little neglected. And then she made off for the police-court, where she found one of the officers who had seen her at the station, and who, learning her errand, conducted her to the magistrate's private door, and apprised her that “the Beak had shown.”

Paul Chequerbent's liberality at the station-house had ensured for his pretty little friend an attention which possibly she might not otherwise have gained. For on her knocking at the magis-

trate's private door, and presenting her splendid card, the policeman, who knew her, made such a sign to the one who opened the door, that he received the imposing document without a grin, ushered her into a waiting-room, and went through a double-door, into the presence. There was a pause, during which little Angela, with a fluttering but a resolute heart, unfastened her bonnet-strings and repeated some words to herself.

"Ah! well—let her come in," she heard a deep, kindly-sounding voice say, as the doors opened. The policeman beckoned her.

I think she was a little taken aback as she entered the magistrate's room with a hasty but heroine's step. She rather expected to be confronted with somebody more theatrically terrible. She supposed she should find a stern potentate in robes, and with a fierce frown; while his chin, high in air, in the fashion of stage-haughtiness, should be over his left shoulder, his hand should have rested significantly upon the open volume of the law. Her intended rush was somewhat spoiled when she found herself before a portly gentleman, certainly, with grave but handsome features, which lighted with a pleasant, encouraging smile as she entered, and who even bowed slightly and laid down his newspaper to hear what she had to say. She hesitated.

"You wished to speak to me," said the magistrate, taking up her card and trying to read it, "Miss—a—Lumpingstart—Leamington—I beg your pardon?"

"Livingstone, sir," faltered out poor Angela, who was beginning to think that her proposed plan of attack might not be altogether so eligible as she had fancied it.

"So it is," said Mr. Prior, "but you young ladies write such Italian hands that they are troublesome to an English eye. Well, do you wish to speak to me on business?"

"To speak to him on business," Angela thought, was hardly cue enough for the speech she meditated, so she timidly explained that a gentleman of the name of Chequerbent was to be brought up that morning before his lordship for an assault.

"Don't say lordship," said Mr. Prior, "because that is premature. And whom has your friend been assaulting? You?"

"No, sir," said Angela, startled into new excitement by this sudden and injurious supposition, "he would protect me with

his life. But in a moment of ungovernable rage, and stung into unmeasured madness by a taunt hurled at me by a wretch, he raised his hand against the base minion of tyranny—at least—his name is Shaddles,” said Angela, getting bewildered and travelling out of the theatrical record.

The magistrate looked amused for a moment, and then said,—

“Is the affair a theatrical squabble, Miss Livingstone? Because if so, I hope it will be made up without my interference. You know that words which would be tremendous between private people go for nothing among professionals.”

“It is not so, sir,” said Angela, once more, resolving to try her powers, and gaining confidence at the grave fatherly voice of the magistrate. Measuring her distance, like a practised artist, she suddenly dropped her bonnet, dishevelled her hair in a second, and dashing to his knee, knelt before him.

“Mercy, sir, O mercy,” she exclaimed in those wild and piteous tones which nightly drew tears down the grimy cheeks of her Hoxton audiences, in the speech from *The Hangman’s Darling*; or, *The Bride of the Gallows*, with which she now favoured the worthy magistrate. “Mercy for his own young blood, mercy for his father’s grey hairs. Misled by infatuation, he has plunged into the abyss of crime; but while the white-robed angel of Pity weeping waves her gentle wings over the storm-lashed deep of Passion, the boisterous surge may be baffled of its victim, and the wanderer’s bark find happy harbour. Mercy, sir, for you too are human—nay, think not that I mean to insult you—but in that quivering lip I see the workings of compassion, and in that glistening eye I behold the dew of sympathy, a thousand times more precious than the diamonds sparkling upon the monarch’s brow.”

Inspired by her own energy, she almost listened for the three rounds of thunderous applause which habitually greeted her clever and spasmodic delivery of the above beautiful passage. Instead of that demonstration, however, as she hid her face between her pretty hands, really crying, but sobbing with her shoulders in good melodramatic style into the bargain, the magistrate took her hand and raised her to her feet.

“Your elocution does you great credit,” he said, “and the authors who write for you are fortunate fellows. And now tell

me what you came about. See what is going on, Williamson," he added to the attendant policeman, who had stood considerably astonished and scandalised at the scene. "Now," he said, as the officer withdrew,—“what is it? You know I have but little time to spare.”

Angela's tears now flowed very fast indeed ; but having relieved her mind by the heroic effort, on the effect of which she found she had miscalculated, she told her little story in plainer English, taking the whole fault upon herself for coming to Mrs. Sellinger's in her Apollo dress, and begging the magistrate not to inflict a dreadful punishment on Paul.

“I can decide the case only as it comes before me in evidence, you know,” said Mr. Prior, “and in strictness I ought not to listen to you at all, for we have no asides here. However, I don't know that you need be very much terrified for your friend. And now I am going into court, and I leave you to put on your bonnet at your leisure. Good-bye.”

In the meantime Paul had been brought into the court, and, at a suggestion from his friend, the attendant policeman, had taken a seat at the table below the dock, where he was not exposed to much observation. He was soon informed that Mr. Shaddles had come, and rising, he beheld that gentleman looking very vindictive, and with nearly half of his face eclipsed in a huge green shade, which acted like a blinker, and made him walk awkwardly, as if trying to get round its corner. He was attended by his two daughters, who looked as if they came by command, and seemed fidgety and uncomfortable, and by no means grateful to him for thrusting them into rather a prominent seat, and talking to them loudly.

Paul immediately went up to Mr. Shaddles, and said, in a manly way enough,—

“Mr. Shaddles, I was both irritated and tipsy last night, and I find that I conducted myself very absurdly, and, as regards yourself, very unjustifiably. I am ashamed of myself for what I did, and I should be more ashamed of myself if I were afraid to say so. I am willing to apologise to you, in the presence of such of your friends as were at the ball, and to pay five pounds, in your name, into the poor-box, or to any charity you like. I don't know that I can say much more.”

“*O, pa !*” imprudently exclaimed one of the girls, quite colour-

ing up with pleasure, "I'm sure he couldn't speak more gentlemanly ; could he, Nelly?"

"No," was upon Nelly's tongue, but she had looked into her parent's face, and the half-formed word expired, as the classics say. Mr. Shaddles's scowl, or rather the instalment of it, visible outside the shade, was rather vicious. Having apprised his child that she had better hold her tongue, and be quick about it, the amiable Shaddles turned to Mr. Chequerbent.

"O!" he grunted, with his head on one side, and his mouth held half open, to let the taunt come slowly out, "O!"

Now, as was said about Gibbon's history, nobody can refute a sneer, and it is equally difficult to offer a repartee to a zoological noise ; so Paul, though marvellously inclined to echo it, held his tongue.

"No," said Mr. Shaddles, with a savage oath, "not if you was to offer fifty pound : what, I've brought you on your knees, my swell, have I?"

"Why, no," said Paul, "not exactly that ; but I think that when a gentleman has acted wrongly, he ought to apologise ; and, what is more, I think that a right-minded man will accept his apology."

"O, you're a gentleman, and I'm a man, am I?" retorted Mr. Shaddles, furiously. "Very well, my gentleman, we'll see what the man can do. I know all about it : devilish little apology you'd have made, if you hadn't been in a funk, and now you think, with your swaggering airs, to carry it all off. Into that dock you walk, my cove," concluded Mr. Shaddles.

"It's your place to give orders in the court, I suppose," said, sharply, the policeman, who had witnessed the interview ; "perhaps you'd mind your own business, and not make that row."

"O, what?" said the enraged Mr. Shaddles, vindictively ; "that's the game, is it? Palm oil, hay? Now, *you'd* best mind what sort of evidence you give presently, Master Peeler, or I shall know what it means. Look out, that's all."

"Don't be afraid, Shaddles," replied the officer haughtily. "You'd better take your seat, sir," he said to Paul. "Here comes his worship ;—silence!"

The Beak seated himself, and for some time there passed before him a portion of the grim phantasmagoria of depravity, want, and brutality, which every morning surges up to the judge-

ment-seat from the turbid sea of London existence. The wife, foully battered and bruised by her husband, came, as usual, and hardly raised her swollen eyes to deny his counter-charge of drunkenness and aggravation. The mother was there to beg the law to protect her from the child that robbed and kicked her, and the sullen and vicious cub replied with a lie of starvation and ill-usage. The baby was laid, all bones and bruises, before the minister of justice, to testify that a beast's dam is kinder than some baptized and married mothers. Vile women, hoarse and pert, told their shameless quarrels, and bared their flesh to show the wounds of nails and teeth. A brawny ruffian, his head and face seamed with crimson plasters, pleaded that drink had maddened him, and hoped that the blows he had received before he could be secured, might atone for his having mutilated three or four officers. Children were placed behind a barrier, over which nothing but their shock hair and bright eyes could be seen, to be judged for pilfering, while the Jew fence, or the marine-store keeping Christian, lurked near the door, to hear whether his pupils were to rejoin him at once, or after some whipping and imprisonment. A lithe-limbed pick-pocket took his thirtieth sentence, with a pleasant bow to his judge; an Irish beggar-woman sobbed and howled frightfully during the hearing, and then flung a stone at the chief clerk's bald head; a maniac preacher announced his divine mission, with hideous cries about eternal fire and the undying worm; and a consumptive gay woman, in yellow satin and a lace bonnet, was bound over not to assault a brown and corpulent hag, who lent her the trappings for her dreadful trade, and exacted, in return, nearly the last sixpence it produced. Such were some of the "cases" of the day. Take a chair in a police-court for one morning, and you will, perhaps, go away with a resolve to do quietly, and to the best of your power, the work which lies nearest your hand, but not to shout very much, for the future, when Mr. Sadducee, in the Commons, boasts about this enlightened age, and Earl Pharisee, in the Lords, brags about this Christian nation.

Mr. Shaddles's case came on at last, and the worthy man, being placed in the witness box, and having knocked up his green shade in his extreme eagerness to bring the inspired volume to his lips, gave his evidence against Paul with great

bitterness, and held forward his discoloured eye for the examination of the magistrate. He looked rather disappointed that the latter did not recoil with horror at the sight, but Mr. Prior was in the habit of seeing so many dozen black eyes a-week, that he merely glanced at it with a quiet "Humph--ah." Mr. Shaddles was then about to call his daughters as witnesses, when Paul begged that his admission of having struck the blow which produced the effect exhibited might save these young ladies the trouble of being sworn.

The policeman who had been cautioned by Mr. Shaddles then got into the box.

"From information which I had received your worship I watched Mrs. Sellinger's ouse in Spelton Street where a dance was being carried on. At twenty minutes to twelve I eard a gent in the all say that there would be a row in two-twoes to which the other replied and no mistake. The door was open your worship and a cab at the door number 2642."

"What do you talk that nonsense for?" said the magistrate. "Do you mean that there are two thousand six hundred houses in Spelton Street?"

The officer had learned his lesson so well, that being interrupted put him out, and he considered for a minute. Then he looked uncomfortably at the magistrate and said, in a low and troubled voice,—

"The cab, your worship."

"Very well," said Mr. Prior, "then you should have said the cab."

"Number 2642," resumed the officer, going off again in good style, "and many coats and hats in the passage which I kep my eye upon. Hearing screams I ran up the steps and see the parlour door—"

"Saw the parlour door," murmured the magistrate, by way of protest, but did not stop the witness.

"Open and this person," pointing to Mr. Shaddles, "a squaring up to this gentleman (Paul) and trying to hit him upon which this gentleman likewise square up."

"But he had knocked me down first," bawled Mr. Shaddles, from the floor of the court.

"Be quiet, Sir," said Mr. Prior, "you have given your evidence. The officer can swear only to what he witnessed."

"O, that be hanged!" said the excitable grocer, "it's all jugglery."

"You will be removed from the court if you make another such remark," said Mr. Prior; "you do not help your case by showing that your temper is so bad, that even in a court of justice you cannot refrain from misbehaviour."

How the oppressed Misses Shaddles enjoyed this speech, and how they promised themselves the pleasure of reporting it to a rather nagging mamma they had at home! It would be good stock for her.

"Then the ladies and gents crowded round them and I just stepped to shet the street-door and then I came in and Shaddles gave this gentleman in charge and I locked him up your worship."

"But what right had you to lock him up?" said the magistrate. "By your own account he was being assaulted, and only raised his hands in self-defence."

The policeman knew all about it very well, having in truth watched the scene from the momemt Angela, in her Apollo dress, had been drawn into the room, to the discomfiture of the dancers.

"I took him out of the house your worship as was wished by Mrs. Sellinger and all the parties, but he was locked up for rather obstropulous conduct in the street."

"Put my daughter into the box," shouted Mr. Shaddles.

"How old is she?" inquired Mr. Prior. "Does she know the nature of an oath?"

"If she does not, Sir," said the chief clerk, confidentially, "it is not her father's fault—he has been growling an accompaniment of curses all through the policeman's evidence."

"She's nineteen," said Mr. Shaddles: "here, Sarah, get into the box and tell the magistrate that you saw this fellow—"

"Hold your tongue, Sir," interrupted Mr. Prior. "Are you not ashamed to dictate to a witness, and that witness your own child, what she is to swear. I never knew an instance of more disgraceful behaviour."

The furious grocer was so seldom put into harness in this way, that little white streaks of foam actually showed themselves at the corners of his lips. He rubbed his stubby hands over one another, and glared fearfully as Miss Sarah took off a tight

glove from a fat little hand, and pressed the testament to her large pleasant-looking mouth.

"What did you see of this affray, Miss Shaddles?" said the magistrate.

"There was a young person brought into the room, sir," said Miss Shaddles, casting down her eyes (for she had a good deal of that middle-class modesty which hastens to fix upon any objectionable subject, and then disquiets itself therewith), "in a strange dress, though no doubt very proper in its place, and some unpleasantness was felt, though I dare say no offence was meant."

Miss Sarah was determined to do her best for Paul, if only to beat her father.

"Of that you can hardly judge," said Mr. Prior. "But come to the assault."

"I did not see the assault, sir," said Miss Shaddles, "for I was dancing at the other end of the room; but when I came up, papa was fighting with Mr. Chequerbent, and had received a shocking blow, and I was so terrified on his account that I am quite unable to give any further information."

"You have proved nothing yet, Mr. Shaddles," said the magistrate. "There is your daughter, naturally anxious to make the best case she can for you, but she only swears that you were fighting. Can the other young lady prove more?"

"I don't think so, sir," said Miss Sarah, "because she was my *vis-à-vis*."

"Why, I could bring a dozen witnesses," cried Shaddles, "who all saw him hit me the moment I called him an offensive puppy."

"It is all very well to say that you *could*," said Mr. Prior, with provoking calmness, "but I sit here to decide on the evidence that *is* brought. You admit that you used exceedingly objectionable language, and from your conduct here to-day, insulting the court, dictating to a witness, and uttering blasphemies in the hearing of the officials, I think that quite probable. Have you anything to say?" he added, turning to Paul.

The policeman gave a look as much as to say, "Not such a flat," but he was in error.

"Only, sir, that none of us behaved too creditably; but as I

have been locked up—I mean as I have been in the station-house all night—perhaps——”

“Serve you right, and I hope you will remember it. The case is dismissed.”

Paul was soon out of court, and was received in the passage by Angela, who was all smiles and delight, and who looked so pretty that we must not be too hard upon Paul for being unable to resist the temptation of again postponing his journey to Aspen, in order to take her to dine somewhere or other.

One is afraid to think in what frame of mind the defeated Shaddles took home his daughters and his black eye. Nor was his discomfiture complete until his neighbours, with usual neighbourly kindness, called his attention to the police report in the next day's paper. The conscientious reporter, with whom Mrs. Sellinger had kindly tried to tamper, would not be swayed from his duty to the journal he represented, and gave a full and graphic account of the case. But by some accident Mr. Chequerbent's name was muddled into Speckleback, or something equally unlikely to be recognised by Messrs. Molesworth & Penkridge. I cannot think that this was a wilful blunder,—it must have been an error of the press—for the excellent reporter, in his exceeding desire to be accurate, not only gave Mr. Shaddles's name and address with perfect correctness, but, to prevent a possibility of mistake, added what he must have learned from Paul's friend, the policeman—“The complainant is a tradesman, who has several times been fined for cheating the poor, by ‘riding the monkey’ and other devices for giving false weights, and who has boasted that another week of short weights always repaid him his fine with interest, leaving him the rest of the cheating as clear profit on the quarter.” This was true, and Mr. Shaddles and his fellow-tradesmen still prosper by means of such arrangements.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DEMONS OF THE CAPE.



ORD ROOKBURY, privately deciding that the Misses Wilmslow were very pretty, proceeded to cultivate their acquaintance forthwith, and being, as has been observed, a very gentlemanly old nobleman, speedily made himself acceptable. He entered so easily into the zoological occupation of the moment, and seemed to take so much interest in the assembled menagerie, that the girls were quite delighted with him, and began to consult his opinion on points of training and education, as if he had been their friend and confidant since their respective christenings. And as he chatted away, the old Sybarite duly noted and approved Emma's brown curls, and Kate's large eyes, and, despite Amy's shawls, and rather moped look, he made out that she varied and completed a charming group, and he half resolved to order down a painter, and have a sketch made, for the adornment of one of his rooms. It was a sad thing that the old man's appreciation of physical beauty was so keen, while his regard for moral beauty was so stagnant; a classical scholar, too, as he was, and one who might have learned from Horace, and other virtuous writers, how superior mind is to matter, and so forth.

Mr. Wilmslow, meantime, was pacing from room to room upstairs, in great disquiet concerning the errand of the visitor. But at last Carlyon came in, and Henry Wilmslow, calling him behind a door, intimated, with great mystery, and many grimaces, that he suspected a Philistine was about.

"No, no," said Bernard, "Philistines don't ride horses like that I saw at the door. I will reconnoitre, however." And, hearing voices in the garden, he went down, and found the young ladies exceedingly amused at a story Lord Rookbury was telling them about a sea-crab, which had, by some accident, been dropped from a cart, and left on the green of an inland village, the inhabitants of which were very Protestant, but not very well informed. The Earl was saying that such a thing had never been seen by the oldest inhabitant, and he was describing, with much humour, the proceedings at a public meeting, which

was called to consider the queer-looking stranger, and at which it was decided, by a large majority, that the hideous creature must be one of those Roman Catholics, of whom they had heard so much. As Carlyon came out into the garden, the girls all called to him at once that he must come and hear one of the best stories in the world.

"All Lord Rookbury's stories are the best stories in the world," said Carlyon, raising his hat. The Earl returned his salute, and eyed him keenly, it was hard to say whether favourably or not. The girls looked much surprised; in fact, his lordship had not mentioned his name, and had at once begun to talk so pleasantly, that it did not occur to them to consider whether he had one.

"O, are you Lord Rookbury, sir?" said little Amy, with her usual straightforwardness.

"Dear me, did I not say so?" said the Earl; "I thought I had introduced myself. I must make you all sorts of apologies. I sent in my card, however, and fancied it had been brought to you. This gentleman received it, I suppose, as he knows me."

"No," said Bernard; "and the servant has evidently suppressed it. Mr. Wilmslow is unaware of your lordship's visit; I will find him."

"A relation?" asked Lord Rookbury, as Carlyon went off. "You have no brother, I think, Miss Wilmslow?" he said, addressing Kate.

"Emma is Miss Wilmslow," said Kate, handing the inquiry to her sister to be answered, and with a little blush, which did not escape the Rookbury eye.

"That is Mr. Bernard Carlyon," said Emma. "He is no relation, but he comes from the firm of lawyers, who managed our trial, and he is staying with us."

"Understands all about the estate, eh? A very gentlemanly person, apparently," said the Earl.

"I think he understands all about everything," put in Amy; "don't you Kate?"

"We all like him very much," said Kate, "and he is very good and attentive."

"Not lately," said the accurate Amy, with a becoming expression of petulance; "not since the time came when he began to *go out by himself*, and stay away nobody knows how long; and

if he does not behave better, I shall tell him to go back to London. He has no business to neglect me now that I am getting stronger, and he might be of use in walking me about, and reading to me. He knows that I do not read French fast enough to enjoy the stories half so much as when he translates."

"Sad fellow, to neglect duties which he seems to have begun so well," said Lord Rookbury; "I must talk to him, if you'll let me?"

"How can you be so silly, Amy?" said Emma; "I am sure that nobody could be more kind than Bernard was, all the time you were ill."

"And is that any reason for his being unkind when I get well?" demanded resolute Amy, who stood to her guns.

"Bernard, too," said the Earl to himself. "All very pretty. Ha! here comes the king of the castle—blessed donkey, by all accounts—looks it too." And he advanced to meet Wilmslow, who came forth in a great frustration, blundering out half a dozen contradictory lies, by way of excuse for his delay. The Earl said but few words, but they were kind and graceful, and exactly expressed the congratulation which one large-acred gentleman should offer to another on the recovery of his rights, without making too much fuss about it. He cordially welcomed Wilmslow into their county, with a manner which said that now, perhaps, the county might go on decently. And then he complimented Wilmslow upon his charming family, in a way which really intimated that the world owed him gratitude for having favoured it with such a group; and Wilmslow almost began to believe that he had been a model father and educator, and, at that moment, a very little brandy would have made him quite sentimental.

"Haw, yes, my lord," said Henry the humbug, drawing Kate to him, in a most affectionate manner, "after all, there's nothing like one's children,—aw. They make one happy, when nothing else could." And certainly, that was the only time he tried the experiment.

"That," said the Earl, who always took his cue at a moment's notice, "that, and the society of their mother. I am, unhappily, a widower, and the solace of female sympathy is therefore denied me, but the memory of my own married happiness teaches me to appreciate that of others."

"An admirable person, in every respect, is my wife, yes, though I say it that shouldn't say it," responded Henry.

I trust to see Mrs. Wilmslow," said the Earl, "if only to assure her that I hope she will remember we are neighbours. Rookton is not quite what it ought to be—what place is, without a lady?—but I have some pictures, and the conservatories are in good order. I ought to be a great deal more ceremonious, but these young ladies have made me feel as if I had known you all for years."

"Quite right, my Lord," said Wilmslow, feeling perfectly comfortable, as Lord Rookbury had intended. "Ceremony is uncalled for among people whose position in society makes them sure there is no mistake" (the Ambassador was coming out); "and if the aristocracy of England cannot afford to waive ceremonials among themselves, who the doose can?"

"You be hanged, with your aristocracy, you insolvent snob," was the indignant reply thought by Lord Rookbury, though, for that matter, he had no right to think it, for, as we have seen, the Wilmslows came in at the Conquest, or said they did, whereas the Rookburys were strictly anonymous until the Revolution.

"*We'll* waive it, at any rate, Mr. Wilmslow," said the Earl, and continued to talk in a familiar off-hand way until Mrs. Wilmslow arrived. And then his manner gradually changed, for though he knew perfectly well that these Wilmslows were living in a corner of their house, and had been very needy, and had still no money to spare, and could not visit their richer neighbours, he knew a little too about feminine nature. And though the free-and-easy style was just the thing to please Henry, the Earl was aware that a well-regulated English matron has no idea of being condescended to, and he was much too wary to let Mrs. Wilmslow think he wanted to make allowance for her want of means, and to get her to come in undignified fashion to Rookton. So, while nothing could be pleasanter than his manner to Jane, there was also nothing in it which could make her think his lordship did not suppose she had a dozen carriages and a troop of horses on the other side the garden, instead of *not* having there the two little ponies of her ambition. He made no attempt at an engagement, knowing that Mrs. Wilmslow would like to receive a formal invitation, duly carded and crested and so forth, but after walking about the great hall with the

family, finding a likeness to Emma in one of the family portraits, and holding that young lady's hair from her face in order to make the resemblance more striking, he mounted his impatient horse and departed, a good deal pleased with the ladies of the family, and leaving them and their head a good deal pleased with him.

Just on going away Lord Rookbury said, as if suddenly recollecting the subject,—

"I don't see your friend, Mr. Carlyon—but he hunts, I think. Tell him that Thursday is the last day, and that they meet at Featherstone-edge. I dare say he knows it, though, and I shall see him there. But perhaps Miss Kate will say so to him for me."

The message was duly delivered by Kate, who wanted to know whether Bernard had been acquainted with Lord Rookbury, and how he came to recognise his lordship so readily.

"I never spoke to him until to-day," said Carlyon, "but I have occasionally heard him lecture the House of Lords. And the face is not one which it is easy to forget."

"And do you go and hear the speeches in Parliament?" asked Kate.

"Sometimes. One likes to see machinery at work you know."

"And sometimes, I dare say, you wish that you were part of the machinery, is it not so?"

"I don't know. I never wish. But," he said, laughing, "I should make a very good member of Parliament, for I can hold my tongue, which is a remarkable gift in days when everybody can speak. If one could only push one's talents a little further, and be the only member in the House who could not read. Imagine the being independent of all the best sources of information."

"It is all very well to talk nonsense," said Kate, gravely, "but I believe you would distinguish yourself very much, and that you think so yourself."

"Well, when I have a chance, I shall expect you to lurk behind the ladies' grating, and judge me. And now let us see about the grating for your rabbit-hutch."

But on the Thursday, Carlyon was at the meet of the Z. P. H., at Featherstone-edge. He had managed to get a pretty good mount, and as he rode light, and with judgment, had upon three or four previous occasions kept a fair place for a gentleman who

dropped in upon the hunt as an amateur. He had not ridden over anybody, certainly, but then nobody had ridden over him, which was something, and I need hardly say he had escaped being sworn at for any blundering. Altogether, though not riding a horse which permitted him to do more than get respectably through the business, he had made the best use of his materials. To-day the hounds soon found, and an extraordinarily good run followed. The pace was desperately telling, and of the few who saw the last death of the season, Lord Rookbury and Bernard Carlyon were two. But while the splendid hunter from the Rookton Woods stable looked more splendid than ever, as he sprang eagerly into the field where Reynard the Fox was dying mute, like Bertram Risinghame in the church, Carlyon's more plebeian animal, though he had got through his work gallantly, struggling, yet stemming all, and bringing his rider to the post of honour, gave unmistakeable signs of being thoroughly done up.

Lord Rookbury had bowed courteously to Carlyon at the cover-side, and had immediately sent up the stranger above five hundred per cent. in the estimation of the observant members of the Z. P. H. He waited until the last rites were over, and then rode up to Bernard.

"I thought it would be so, Mr. Carlyon," he said, nodding at the distressed horse of the latter, "and you have managed admirably to get him here. You are just sixteen miles from home. My groom will meet me with a fresh horse somewhere about. Do me the favour to take that, we'll leave this fellow at Toring, the hamlet over there, and if you will come and lunch with me at Rookton Woods, we'll send you home to-night, or in the morning, or when you like."

Worse offers may be made to a man on a jaded horse sixteen miles from home, and in an hour from that time the Earl and Carlyon were descending a bridle-path which led them to Rookton Woods.

The house was somewhat curiously situated. The original owner, or his architect, had selected the centre of a small valley, or rather a species of basin, surrounded by wooden slopes, for the site of the mansion, which however, though it lay low, as regarded much of the circumjacent country, was placed upon a gentle elevation in the midst of the basin. Into *this basin* water was turned on, for a pretty, clear little river,

plashing over stones, wound round two-thirds of the central mound—it was scarcely more—and was crossed by a couple of bridges, one of stone and pretentious, the other rustic and effective. The house itself was one of those modern Gothics from which Mr. Oldbuck so devoutly prayed to be delivered, but which, though defenceless in point of taste, was singularly defensible as a most convenient and luxurious dwelling. It is possible that no ingenuity could have drawn a faithful plan of the confused and miscellaneous apartments which shot out, struck out, and jutted out, according to their degrees of prominence, from the external sides, on which advanced towards one another, crossed, or ran parallel in the centre, but at any rate there was a noble dining-room, a range of capital drawing-rooms, a comfortable library, a picture gallery, and a billiard-room, a ball-room, (with a large organ in it,) besides “all the ordinary requirements of a nobleman’s mansion.” And, after all, a house is made to live in.

“There is Rookton below us,” said the Earl, as the narrow bridle-path emerged from among some lofty leafless elms. “It was built, in part, by an ancestor of mine, who found his account in bribing the Duchess of Kendal, George the First’s mistress, a good deal. I’ll show you her picture. An ugly wretch. I believe she cheated us in some way, too, after all our trouble in corrupting her, which proves that she was unprincipled as well as ugly.”

“Was that the lady who thought the king’s soul revisited her in the form of a rook?” said Carlyon.

“No, hang it,” said the Earl, “not a rook—a raven. For the honour of one’s crest let us be exact. I should be ashamed to think that a rook had called on a favourite when her loving king was dead, and no more was to be got by the humiliation.”

After riding nearly round the house, they descended, and getting upon the carriage-road, which curved at a lower elevation, and a gentle slope from the public road, three-quarters of a mile off, they crossed the stone bridge, and reached the house.

“Now, Mr. Carlyon,” said Lord Rookbury, as they stood in the spacious hall, where the coloured glass threw upon a few admirable pieces of sculpture that cheerful false light which answers for sunshine when the real article is not procurable, “I

will first entrust you, for your bodily comfort, to the care of Jameson here, and, after some lunch, we will settle other arrangements."

Was it Canning, or somebody else, who, hearing a virgin orator of some promise sailing very safely through a sea of common-places, remarked,—

"Confound that young man, why don't he risk himself a little?"

Bernard Carlyon risked himself a good deal that day.

I am not going to justify him, or anybody else. But it should be recollected that Bernard had much upon his mind. Firstly, he was in love. Next, he had had a most mystifying and apparently ridiculous proposition made to him by the guardian of the lady of his dreams, and the consideration of the subject had occupied him day and night, and by no means tended to keep his mind in that healthy state at which it has perfect control over the body. Thirdly, he had ridden very hard for sixteen miles, and less hard for four more, but then, during the last stage, he had been talking to an Earl of so much age and note, that he was almost an institution of the country, and you may say as much as you like about all mankind being equal, as of course they are, but there is an excitement in the effort to hold your own with a celebrity—peer, cook, or even book-writer. Lastly, the Earl of Rookbury gave Bernard some extraordinarily fine Madeira.

No part of this history shall be shirked; and whatever damage I may do to the character of my hitherto unobjectionable, and I may say courageous, chivalrous, and intelligent Bernard, I will not deny that at this artistic lunch, and under the agency of wine, round which the Demons of the Cape had howled, as it lay trembling, years before, in the dark hold, and which now came forth for his especial discomfiture, Mr. Bernard Carlyon unbosomed himself to Lord Rookbury in a way which, on his first interview with a nobleman, be he ever so affable, a young gentleman is seldom encouraged to adopt.

But it was not entirely, or in the main, his own doing. That artful Earl, who had been advantageously impressed by Bernard's manners, and evident talent, amused himself by drawing him out. And Lord Rookbury was an old hand, and had lived in the days when men could laugh and drink—vulgaries

happily exploded. He had an ample supply of anecdote, when he chose to be lazy, and of wit, when he chose to take the trouble to talk. His manner was peculiarly agreeable, if he so willed it. He passed his Madeira, (a philtre he had tried upon many an hereditary legislator, and many an aspiring candidate, with singular success as a test of their contents,) as matter of course, and as hardly worth calling wine, while he occupied the attention of Bernard with his own shrewd and fascinating discourse, and ultimately succeeded in inducing that young person to open the flood-gates of his feelings. And when a person of habitual and strong self-command, and also of strong will, loses the one, and surrenders the other, it may be superfluous to say that he gets very demonstrative indeed.

Therefore, and urged by the Demons of the Cape, did Bernard Carlyon set forth to the amused and listening peer, that, proud as was his position and beautiful as was his estate, he, Bernard, would some day achieve a proud position and a beautiful estate too. That he felt he had it in him, and he confidently demanded of Lord Rookbury whether there were not egregious fools in both Houses of Parliament who were listened to, and who rose in the State. To which the Earl willingly assented, confirming his opinion by a great oath. Then Carlyon put it, logically, that if he, not being an egregious fool, could obtain such a start as the unwise persons in question, he should rise. Bernard then waxed almost pathetic, and stated his case as that of a young, talented, well-educated man, and a gentleman, who, in the present vicious state of society, had no means of living, but by linking himself to a worn-out system of falsehood, called law, the technicalities of which disgusted him, while its practical and cruel injustice offended his sense of humanity. He dwelt upon the hardship of having to grind out his heart at the wheel, for the sake of a morsel of bread, while less gifted persons were making name and wealth—winning beautiful and affectionate wives, and having children growing up around them. Lord Rookbury made faces at these last points, but generally agreed with Bernard, and gave him more wine. Finally, Bernard burst out into a comprehensive peroration, in which he rather neatly summed up his own hopes and merits, and unsparingly denounced the whole system, including the law, the church, the senate, and the aristocracies of rank and of mammon, which forbade him to

earn an honourable and gentlemanly livelihood. There, his exceedingly improper conduct is told, and I am heartily shocked at it.

Lord Rookbury was not shocked at all. He saw no harm in being intoxicated, or in any other vice whatever that amused one's-self or annoyed one's enemy. His own first public appearance had been in a state of drunkenness, as we have recorded, on the night of the Nelson funeral, and he had repeated that representation once or twice since. No man lost in the estimation of the Earl of Rookbury by being drunk, unless he proved himself a snob in his cups. Now Bernard Carlyon, not in thick speech, or broken voice, but in unfaltering and audacious language, had told Lord Rookbury, at his own hearthstone, certain things, utterly improper to be spoken in a well regulated and orderly age, and least of all, to a respectable nobleman ; but, after all, things which may not be utterly disconnected with truth, and which, in early life, and before we grow orthodox fatalists, a good many promising young people are ill-educated enough to feel.

Then did Lord Rookbury, with much affected carelessness and real art, seek to elicit from Bernard a variety of particulars touching Aspen Court and its owners. But here the accomplished nobleman signally failed, for Bernard would not be pumped. He would speak of nobody's affairs but his own, and, put the questions as he would, the Earl could get nothing that was available. And he saw, too, that this was not the result of the stolidity, which sometimes, I am told, follows the first excitement of wine, but was obviously the fruit of an acquired habit of not talking idly on other people's affairs. Lord Rookbury noted this, and rather applauded it. However, he determined, to risk another shot. Passing the wine, he said,—

"Well, my young friend, I think you have only done justice to yourself in securing one of the Aspen heiresses. And so we will drink her health."

Carlyon was more nearly restored to his entire senses by this speech than one would have believed it possible for a man to be. But every puppet has one string which runs through all its framework, and only find that, and you may convulse your puppet at your will. He had, in his recent indignant declamation, instinctively avoided the slightest reference to his hopes in regard to

Lilian. He took it for granted that Lord Rookbury had received some intimation on the subject. Another evil of drinking, young people, is, that it sometimes makes you too intelligent.

"I have no right," said Bernard, "to think of that which you refer to. I would not refuse such a toast, but it must not be so introduced."

"No right, my dear Bernard?" said his Lordship, paternally. "All the right in the world. I am an old man, and I know what young ladies mean by their looks. You have her affections, and the deuce is in it if, with your talents, you cannot manage the rest. Come, her health, I say. Miss Kate Wilmslow."

Bernard was conscious of a very curious sensation, a mixture of shock and irritation, and—a very little self-reproach. For he had for some time entertained certain faint suspicions, which he had chosen to stifle, but which, when the subject was thus brought up, prevented his meeting the Earl's eye with quite the steadiness he ought to have shown.

"Your Lordship utterly mistakes," he said, gravely.

"Of course I do—we old men always mistake everything—and you look as if I mistook, Mr. Carlyon. However, I have no right to refer to such a matter—only, when it is no longer a mystery, perhaps you will remember that the old Earl told you the young lady's heart was yours."

And Bernard's conscience told him that he believed it too, and in his state of bewilderment he did not make a very effective disclaimer of any such hopes, and Lord Rookbury listened, bowed in a gentlemanly manner, not accepting it in the least, and changed the subject.

They continued to chat, Carlyon improving the impression he had made upon the Earl, and, though talking with remarkable unreserve, talking neither flippantly nor foolishly. And Lord Rookbury occasionally put forth one of his best and bitterest sarcasms, and found no dull or unappreciative listener. Veiled or patent, the epigram told with Bernard. Besides, he happened to have read a little; and even though one of Lord Rookbury's *mots* based itself on a political situation or a court intrigue of the remote date of twenty years back, Carlyon was not so completely mystified by the allusion as most of the ruck of young men of society would have been. He actually contrived to tell

the Earl two good things of Luttrell's, which Lord Rookbury had either never heard or forgotten.

"By the way," said the Earl, "I should tell you, that as soon as I had secured you for dinner, I thought the most hospitable thing would be to ask old Seymour—the man with the white hat who fell at the brook—to send up word to Aspen Court, as he passed through the village in his way home. So they will not think that you have broken your neck, if you give me the pleasure of your company until to-morrow. Oh, don't think about dress. The only lady you will see—and whom you certainly will not see when you come over with the Wilmslows—does not mind slippers. We will go through the rooms, if you like; there is light enough to show you where the pictures are, though scarcely to see what they are."

Bernard rather approved of this arrangement, and the Earl showed him the principal rooms of which we have made mention, and especially the picture gallery. In this, nearly the whole of the contents of which had been gathered by Lord Rookbury himself, Carlyon rather expected to find works of a class more akin to the habits of mind and speech of the owner than were the paintings collected there. But he found not the expansive carnal charms of Titian and Etty, the spiritual yet still womanly loveliness of Guido, nor that meretricious cross-breed in art by which the modern French school contrives to depict the Magdalen with the united attractions of Palestine and the Palais-Royal. The majority of the pictures were Dutch, landscape and interior, long dreary wastes of lead-coloured dykes, or the stereotype brace of boors, one drinking, the other tumultuously fondling a hideous landlady. It was odd.

"I know what you think," said the Earl, after watching Bernard's survey, which was very rapidly completed. His eye was not an artist's, and it hungered for a little graceful form and pleasant colour. "You would give all my canvas for an Italian sky, with nymphs at noon; eh?"

"No, but I think I would warm your Lordship's gallery with just two or three pictures that did not suggest the impending ague or the approaching constable."

"You are right, perhaps. But do you know this—that I hate to be cheated? Now I should never be quite sure about an *Italian* or *Spanish* picture; connoisseurs know no difference

between originals and copies, let them say what they like ; and dealers are—dealers. Personally, I do not care a farthing whether a picture that pleases me was executed at Florence by Raphael, or in Wardour Street by Levi Daub. But I should not like to know that people who had stayed here said at dinner, that the Rookton collection was well enough, but that the only original in the house was Lord Rookbury."

"Everybody says those things. An Englishman has described as a copy, a picture by Rubens, that has never been out of the chamber in which he executed it."

"I do not like it—that's all. Now you know one can't be cheated in these Dutch pictures ; they have been in few hands, and every one of them has an authenticated pedigree of ownership. Their legitimacy is untarnished."

"So be it," said Bernard ; "I prefer something pretty, and don't desire legitimacy."

"Very well," said the Earl, smiling, "possibly Rookton may be able to satisfy even that combination of taste. But now I must write some letters for town. I think you have the *carte du pays* ; in the library you will find some good prints, the London papers, and some French novels ; perhaps you can make out till the bell rings."

Bernard, left alone, established himself in a luxurious easy chair, and began to review the last few hours. The active but evanescent excitement under which he had enlightened Lord Rookbury, passed away, and Mr. Carlyon began to feel peculiarly dissatisfied with himself. He was angry that he had not remembered how unfitted, at the moment, he had been for resisting the influence of wine, and though in trying to recal what he had said to Lord Rookbury, he could recollect nothing of which he needed to be ashamed, he knew what abysses there are in one's memory of a revel, and what ugly things another memory will sometimes evoke from them. Still, he was convinced that his intellect had been at high-pressure all the time, and he felt tolerably sure that he had been preserved from *niaiserie*. It was tolerably clear, too, that he had not annoyed Lord Rookbury, for, if he had, he felt, from what he had made out of that amiable nobleman's character, that he should have been politely dismissed, and half way to Aspen by that time. Somewhat consoled by these recollections, and resolving to keep guard on himself for the rest of the day, he took up a Pari-

sian novel, and the pedantic levity of its introduction soon brought its own antidote:

He must have slept for a couple of hours, when a small soft hand was placed in his own, and a distinct young voice mixed in his dream :—

“ Papa says that you are to take me in to dinner.”

Bernard sprang up, retaining the little hand, however, and found himself in darkness, the open door, at the end of the long library, showing the lighted hall at a distance. He could just make out that his companion was a little girl, and that her hair, on which a ray of the far-off light glistened, was crowned with a white coronal.

“ Did you speak to me more than once, dear ?” said Bernard, as soon as he had recollected himself.

“ Who is Lilian ?” said the child. “ You *might* tell me who Lilian is, before we go in.”

Carlyon bit his lip, and felt more wroth with himself than he had done for a long time.

“ Talk in my sleep, too ?” he muttered, quite bitterly ; “ what is my next foolery ? Lilian, dear ?” he said to the child ; “ O, she is the lady of a pretty song, ‘ Airy, fairy, Lilian.’ Shall I teach it you by-and-by ?”

“ I thought saints did not sing songs, only hymns,” said the little lady.

“ Saints ?”

“ Yes ; you are a saint, you know. Papa told me to fetch you, and that your name was Saint Bernard, and that he knew you would like me, for that you had told him so.”

“ Ah !” said Bernard, after a pause ; “ I think I see. Well, dear, let me take you in to dinner.”

She laid her arm on his wrist, and they emerged into the light, where Carlyon could examine his new friend. She was a fairy-like little thing, with delicate waxen features, almost too regular for prettiness. She was exquisitely dressed, but with far too much elaboration, and her toilet seemed the work of half a dozen French maids, in the innumerable details of its tiny perfections. Even jewellery, in miniature, was arrayed on *her small arms* and taper fingers ; ear-rings sparkled in *her ears*, and she carried an infinitesimal feather-fan. But the voice and manner were childish still.

"You have found our guest, eh, Lurline," said the Earl.

"Yes ; and he is going to teach me a song, papa."

"Ah ! but you musn't flirt with him too much, or eyes, twice as large as yours, will open at you. And now for dinner."

The evening passed away pleasantly enough, Lord Rookbury being particularly agreeable, and Carlyon being desirous of effacing, in some degree, the recollection of his outbreak in the morning. He did not succeed in this attempt, however, for while they lingered over some incomparable claret, the Earl suddenly said :—

"Mr. Carlyon, the confidence you have thought proper to place in me to-day is my excuse for making you an offer which perhaps there is no reason for your acceptance ; and in that case suppose it not made."

"I am glad," said Carlyon, frankly, "that your Lordship gives me an opportunity of saying what certainly ought to be said before I leave Rookton ; namely, that under excitement which—"

"If you are going to abuse my Madeira, I will not hear you," said the Earl. "Four bottles of that wine, judiciously administered, once preserved the religion of these realms—the minority in the Commons, against a most sacrilegious motion being converted into a majority, by the Secretary to the Treasury and myself dosing two church reformers at Bellamy's until they were much too drunk to stumble into the lobby. Respect it, therefore."

"But, only, as I am not a church reformer," said Carlyon, laughing, "I may—"

"A pretty speech for St. Bernard," said the Earl ; "read your own history. But nonsense apart, you have nothing to say, and if you regret that a glass of my wine made you franker than I deserved you should be with me, I do not. Now, I was going to say this. You have told me your distaste for your own profession, and I have studied you enough to know that you ought to aim at a showier if not a higher game. Opportunities do not exactly drop from the skies, except in novels ; but, as somebody says in a play, though we never know what Providence may do for us, it is always as well to be in Providence's way. Now I think I can put you in a tolerable place for the start, but when

the flag falls, you must make good running. Do you know Francis Selwyn?"

"The Minister?"

"Yes,—for the present."

"He wants a private secretary, and would answer any nomination of mine by asking what day my friend would come."

"And you are good enough to think of me, Lord Rookbury," said Bernard with a sparkling eye.

"Think of yourself. Of course it is not what an ambitious young man dreams of, and, I dare say, if you were writing a book, you would picture my turning out one of the old members for this county, and returning you to parliament, where your maiden speech would set all Europe rejoicing. But no race is ever run quite so fast as on paper. I think that if you please Selwyn, he will, on being ejected from office, get you something else, and you may make your way."

"How to thank your lordship—"

"I'll tell you. I like to see my men win. I am accused of taking up whims, and if you are modest, like all good young men, and think yourself undeserving of my assistance, why, fancy that I have taken you up as a whim. Only vindicate my choice, and don't let me be laughed at. Miss Lurline, what are you looking so wistful about?"

"I want St. Bernard to teach me the song about Lilian," said the child plaintively.

"Ah, very true—saints should keep their word. So I shall leave him to do it while I go and write to Frank Selwyn. Is it understood, Mr. Carlyon, or would you like to sleep upon it?"

"Not a moment's delay, my Lord, on my account. I gladly avail myself of a kindness which I shall ever remember."

"Nobody ever remembers kindness," replied the Earl. "Don't be behind your age. But remember that *I like to see my men win.*"

CHAPTER XVI.

"WITH A KISS AND WITH A PRAYER."



ORD ROOKBURY had not miscalculated the weight of his influence with the Minister, and in a couple of days after Carlyon's return to Aspen Court, he received a packet from Rookton Woods, in which was a letter from Mr. Selwyn, requesting his attendance in London as early as possible. With this was a note from Lord Rookbury, who exhorted Bernard to make the best use of his time; for the hours of the Ministry were supposed to be numbered, and it would be well to be in at the death. Bernard ought to have left Aspen instantly on receiving this despatch, and he did leave it, riding hard, but not in order to catch the next up-train to London.

Miss Trevelyan was at home, and would see him.

What a curious sensation that is which troubles a man upon such a mission! Why does the elegantly arranged sentence, studied with so much care, in order alike to avoid formality and familiarity, begin to seem bald, and bold, and bungling, just as it is about to be wanted? Why is it finally revised upon the coarse mat in the hall, and utterly rejected upon the silky mat on the landing? Why do you feel choking, as with thirst, and yet could not drink the elixir of life if it were presented to you? Why would you pay a hundred guineas a step to have the staircase twice as long as it is, and yet you go up as hastily as if you were escaping from a poor relation? Why does that pleasing bow, with which you have so often stooped to conquer—you know it—seem to you at once a great deal too low, and a great deal too slight, and altogether abominable? Why do you wish you had put on that other cravat? In short, why is your sense so keenly awakened to the outward man, and to the outside phrase, and why do you forget that you have hitherto looked like a gentleman and spoken like a philosopher, and generally done your duty in that state of life in which it has pleased Providence to place you, and that there is no particular reason why, at one o'clock this fine day, you should make a failure? Is it a satisfactory answer to say that all this is because there sits in

the low chair near the window, in that drawing-room, a bright-eyed young person of the other sex, who, if you could only see it, can hardly hold her crochet-work for her tremor, who knows intensely well what you mean and what you have come for, and who designs to make you the kindest possible answer, poor thing ! if she should be able to find proper words, and who, in the meantime, is in about as fit a condition to criticise you as I am to correct the Jupiter Symphony or the Nautical Almanac. Let me appeal to some of my friends whether I have over-stated the case. There is Captain Pounder, that big, handsome man, with the black whiskers, who, in one of those dreadful Punjab fights, rode slowly up a slope of three-quarters of a mile towards a fort from which our dear Oriental brethren were blazing upon us with seventy cannons, and remarked to his comrades, as he dashed singly into the narrow breach, that he would "wait inside,"—just ask that dauntless person how he felt when going to propose to Laura Green of the Engineers. Or speak to the Secretary of State for the Unhesitating Department, who thinks nothing of tackling a roaring and excited House of Commons at midnight, dragging a comrade out of a mess, and like Tydides, tearing the strongest battle of his antagonists, amid shouts that would dismay a statue. Only ask how it was that he went three times to make a personal offer to Lady Asphodel Winglington, and at last was obliged to do it in a beautiful despatch—letter, I mean. Do not talk to me about faint hearts and fair ladies—of course we know that many an estimable female is very good-natured, and will give you her hand just as she would give you the salt or the nutcrackers, because you seem to be looking for it, and will in no degree appreciate your making such sentimental fuss about the matter (and a remarkably good partner such a woman will make, too, mind that), but our discourse at present is less of partnership than of marriage.

This digression has given Mr. Carlyon time to vanquish that singular little spasm in the throat, and to present himself with something like composure, though, if Lilian Trevelyan had looked carefully at his eyes, that young lady would have seen that they were peculiarly restless. Bernard was both glad and sorry to find that Lilian was alone. The gladness preponderated, for hosts of reasons, but men get very cowardly at times, and are not *always* sorry for an excuse for delaying what they have made up

their minds to do. And then he thought that the golden hair never could have looked richer, the delicate complexion more fair, the blue eyes more radiant, nor the charming figure more graceful. Who was he, whispered the demon of timidity, sneakingly, that he should presume to claim such a creature for his own? Who was he, answered the demon of ambition, haughtily, the next moment,—actually a Minister's secretary, going to be a Member of Parliament, a Minister himself, Peer of the Realm, Knight of the Garter, Ambassador to France—who knows? Balancing the suggestions of the evil ones, he saw no objection to remarking to Miss Trevelyan that the weather was delicious.

After some other profound observations of the same character had been made and answered, and it would have been clear to a third party, from the exceedingly absurd way in which the merest commonplaces were insisted upon and bungled, that these were flourishes to gain time, and that both these silly young people were sitting in mortal fear of what was coming next, Bernard fixed his eyes intently on one of those Bohemian paper-weights, which was on the table near Miss Trevelyan, and remarked to it that he was about to leave Gloucestershire for London.

"So soon?" said Lilian. A ridiculous thing to say, seeing that the young man had been at Aspen Court more than a month.

"Yes, immediately," said Bernard. "I hardly know," he continued, "whether I am intruding an uninteresting subject upon you in telling you why."

He meant her to have replied—or, rather, how glad he would have been to hear her reply, "Oh, no, Mr. Carlyon, I assure you I take a very great interest in anything that affects your welfare." And yet, if she had said that, he afterwards would have been privately dissatisfied, and called it a species of advance, inconsistent with true delicacy—men are such reasonable creatures. Perhaps it was as well she was silent, and only raised her blue eyes for a single second.

"A change has taken place in my prospects," said Bernard, "and the course I had shaped out for myself has been altered by circumstances. I had looked forward to some years of toil and struggle at the bar, but an offer has been made me which will save me that which I have now the strongest reasons for valuing most, I mean time. The office of private secretary to

one of the ministers has been offered me, with a probability of other advancement, and I have accepted it."

"They will miss you sadly at Aspen Court," said Miss Trevelyan, without looking up. This speech did not help Bernard at all.

"I shall leave Aspen Court to-night," he said, "for it appears that there is a political crisis at hand, and——"

"And you must be there to assist," said Miss Trevelyan, smiling a little mischievously.

"No," said Carlyon, with an open smile, which he could afford, as he knew he had not been going to make a magniloquent speech, "but one does not want to come in at the latter end of a fray."

"I am sure I shall always remember that once, at least, you came into a fray at the right time, Mr. Carlyon," said Lilian. "And I always feel," she continued, "that you have never been properly thanked for your kindness. My poor uncle Eustace is so little in the world that he scarcely knows how to express what I assure you he feels most deeply, and Mr. Heywood talks so oddly that strangers do not know whether to be pleased or insulted, but he speaks to us about you in the warmest way."

"He is very good," said Bernard, rather hastily, "but if you could possibly conceive, Miss Trevelyan, how thankfully I look back upon the accident that introduced us, you would not speak of—of—anything else." That's right, Mr. Bernard, and begin to stutter and talk nonsense just because you think you see an opening.

"Miss Trevelyan," he continued, after a pause, "I am leaving the country, but it is impossible for me to go until I have said that—that which I came here to say." The poor Bohemian weight, how he did stare through and through it—he had much better have looked up to see how exquisitely lovely Lilian Trevelyan was, with the blush over her.

"You know nothing—next to nothing, of me—and assuredly it is not upon the circumstances that made us acquainted that I would presume in order to say more than our slight acquaintance warrants. I have no right to ask you a question, though there *is a question which I would give the world to ask, and my life to hear you answer as I desire.* But will you hear me—will you *allow me to speak—will you only listen to me—and then—if you*

wish it, I am gone—I will ask no word from you, not even a look, only permission to speak.”

His voice faltered with emotion, and some of its tones sounded strangely on his own ear, but he knew that he was speaking earnestly. Could he only have known how much Lilian wished him to go on.

“You do not silence me,” he said, in a low and respectful tone; “do not fear that I will trespass on your exceeding goodness. Miss Trevelyan,” he continued, rising and approaching the beautiful girl, and earnestly and below his breath, “there is no need to tell you that I love you, no hope to tell you how passionately and devotedly. I feel that you have read that for which I have no words. It is not of a love, too sacred, too intense for utterance, that I would speak to you now—on that, if hereafter you should give me one faint sign of the encouragement for which, at this moment, I dare not pray, it will be the happiness of a happy life to dwell. It is for me now, a stranger and undistinguished in the world, to justify, if I can, the presumption which addresses you.”

He fancied, as he stood beside her, that he heard something like an attempt to speak, but the word was unspoken, and the fair head was so bent that the golden curls shrouded the lips from his gaze.

“I am a gentleman by birth and by education,” he went on, “and, having assured you of this, I have little to tell you of the past, except that in the profession which I entered I have obtained such successes as it permits—small matters to vaunt of, were they multiplied by the thousand—triumphs gained for others, and worthless except as stepping-stones to a profitable reputation. But I have won them, and may accept them as omens of a nobler success. To achieve this, I had prepared for the severest and most discouraging of struggles—accident has suddenly favoured me, and I shall rise. It is not, therefore, as an unknown lawyer that I have ventured to address you, but as one who, having his upward way to make, believes that he will make it. And though the best coronet in the peerage would give its possessor no title to speak to you, Miss Trevelyan, in other than the humble tone and with the confession of unworthiness with which I stand before you, one word from you—one word, one sign, ever so slight—and, armed with the hope it will

sanction, I will look at no success as impossible which can make me more worthy of you."

He had shot his bolt, and the period between the twang of the string and the striking, or missing of that shaft, is memorable in the life of some men. The golden head was still bent.

"I asked but to be heard," said Bernard Carlyon, after a few moments, "and you have most kindly heard me. Perhaps you may deem that I presume on your indulgence if I say more, much, very much, as I have yet to say. But it is not to such a nature as yours that I would plead with many words. Dearest Miss Trevelyan, a destiny I never thought should be held in other hands than my own awaits your sentence for happiness or for destruction. I have dared to seek your love, what is there else on earth that I should not dare to seek? what, if possessing that love, I should despair to gain? My heart is before you, and with it my fate. Miss Trevelyan—Lilian!"

How that golden hair trembles, and now, Bernard Carlyon, she is going to look at you; can you not keep your heart from those violent throbbings? man, you will want words presently—you think she is going to move her hand, have yours ready. Laid upon yours her little hand, that is well, and you are on your knee, and the blue eyes look kindly enough upon you, pale as is the beautiful face, and yet you can look away from it. Only to cover the white hand with kisses. Well, you are excused! But speak; will you not? You could knock down two ruffians for her the other day, and yet you will not speak to her now. Tears on her eyelashes, too, and no one to wipe them away. Ah! that is better, a good deal, and though she blushes, she is not angry. Hold her to your heart, for it will never be in such good company to the day it flutters for the last time.

And now Carlyon can find words enough, and to spare, and as Lilian does not try to escape from him, it may be supposed that the unbarring of the flood-gates of his oratory and the ardent avowal of his own passion, and of his conviction of her unsurpassable merits, physical and mental, and of his intense devotion, which, beginning on the little hill near Aspen, is to last, at the shortest date, for ever, are not disagreeable, though her answer, breathed very low, and repeated in a still lower voice, is of the briefest.

"Bernard."

But it makes him transcendantly happy, and he has condescended to believe that there is something in this world decidedly worth living for, a creed to which he would have given a very half-hearted, non-natural kind of adhesion when we first met him.

"And you leave us to-morrow?" asks Lilian, almost sadly.

Why, he had come thither to tell it her, and now that she tells it him, the information comes like news, and disagreeable news. He feels hostile towards Lord Rookbury, despises Mr. Selwyn, and wishes, as they pretend King Something did when asked to sign the death-warrant, that he had never learned to write. No, he suddenly revokes this last wish, and looks upon a pen as a thing plucked from the wing of an angel.

"I may write to you, dear one? And you will write to me—is it not so?"

"Do you wish to write to me?" says Lilian, softly, yet not without a little tiny smile.

No, Carlyon wishes never to have occasion to write to her, and always to be by her side, always to be ready to listen to her slightest word, always—but all this sort of thing must have been said before, some time or other.

However, as the having a young lady, however beautiful, always in the arms of a young gentleman who intends to rise in the political world, might be inconvenient in the House of Commons, and at Cabinet Councils, and otherwise, it is agreed that Carlyon shall go away, and shall write to Lilian, and that she shall answer his letters. And then Bernard, promising that he will never have a secret from her in the world, and very likely meaning it at the time, and designing to show her the list of the very first Cabinet he forms, even before laying it before Her Majesty, proceeds to tell her of his interview with the Jesuit, Mr. Heywood, and of the strange proposal the latter had made to him. Lilian disengaged herself, but not unkindly, from Carlyon's arm, and listened attentively, and with a deep flush upon her brow, and more anger in those blue eyes than a stranger might have thought they could express.

"And Mr. Heywood begged you to take time to consider his proposal," asked she, "and then to come over to Lynfield, and answer it? And you are here to-day."

"Ah!" said Carlyon, interrupting her, "do not for one

moment connect that foolish interview with one which has been the event of my life. You do not, I know—I see.”

“I trust you in everything, and for ever,” answered Lilian, frankly, and again extending her hand. “But you do not know Mr. Heywood.”

“Better than he may think,” returned Bernard, “and at all events, it is something to know that one does not know him. But I treated his proposal as an idle attempt to play with my feelings or to mystify me, and I purposely broke the appointment he made with me. Did he not expect me on Tuesday?”

“It is hard to say when he expects anybody,” replied Lilian, “but I remember that he was at home the whole of that day.”

“And,” said Bernard, “there was a sort of sign which he suggested to me. He had become aware—you had, very naturally, told him, dearest, that a chain of yours was in my hands.”

“I have never mentioned it,” said Lilian, “to him, or to any one else. It was so trifling a matter,” she added, smiling archly, “that perhaps I had forgotten it.”

“But,” said Carlyon, gravely, “this is a little strange. He distinctly said to me that he had your authority to ask me for the chain.”

“And you gave it him?”

Bernard drew forward a few links of the chain, by way of reply, and Lilian looked pleased.

“He proposed,” said Bernard, “that I should retain it until I met him here on Tuesday, and then, if he saw me return the chain to you, he was to understand that I did not entertain his scheme, whatever it might be.”

“And am I to have my chain back again?” asked Lilian, smiling.

“Never,” replied Bernard, earnestly, “if you will permit me to retain it. But may I ask you, darling, whether you comprehend his real drift, and in what way he supposes that I can aid in restoring you the inheritance.”

“Why not ask the question of himself?” said the priest, who had entered the room unperceived by the young people, and who now stood between them with a smile, indicating that he was rather amused.

“An eaves-dropper, Sir?” asked Carlyon, indignantly.

“Why no,” said Heywood, carelessly, “not exactly, though

as one's ears are given one by Providence to hear with, I do not consider it wrong to use them when desirable, and I should have been an eaves-dropper, as you word it, had there been any reason. Well, I presume from Miss Trevelyan's heightened colour that your conversation has been interesting,—may one hear the result?"

"The only part of it I need trouble you with, Mr. Heywood," said Carlyon, "is that which relates to a falsehood you thought it worth while to tell me. You use explicit language, and am sure you will excuse it."

"I scarcely remember the exact words of our conversation," said Heywood, "but my impression is, that I told you several falsehoods, or rather parables, which are falsehoods in illustration of truths,—at once the civiller and the more philosophic way of describing them."

"Of course," said Bernard, with a very lofty scorn, "it is profoundly immaterial to me in what light you consider an untrue statement, but I thought it proper to mention to Miss Trevelyan why I had not obeyed an order you pretended to bring, and I find that it was your own invention."

"Do you know that I like you, young Carlyon?" said the priest, with a good-natured air of patronage, "I like you for coming here to-day, rejecting my plan without hearing it, and honestly avowing your love for this young lady. I did not think, I tell you frankly, that, after what I had said, you would have had the courage to do it."

"As it is impossible," replied Bernard, who thought he saw the trap, "to say how far you have to-day carried out your theory about ears, I shall make no answer to you, except to observe that my courage, be it what it may, was not learned in a seminary where the tutors are courageous enough to teach listening and——"

He hesitated, for tempting as was the alliteration, Lilian was in the room, and Heywood was a clergyman. So he shifted the strong word and added "parables." The priest laughed out.

"I tell you that you will *do* in the House of Commons—cultivate your talent for retort—it is the only thing that ever lifts the debates out of commonplace, now that oratory is abolished. And so you have plighted faith, young people, and are to correspond until Mr. Carlyon becomes Premier, and in the mean-

time he is to keep the chain now round his neck. The whole arrangement seems very complete, and I make you my congratulations, and answer for the approbation of Uncle Eustace, which of course you have not thought worth troubling yourselves about."

"Father Heywood," said Lilian, with some firmness, "we are not strangers, and I can read a kind meaning in a mocking tone. But Mr. Carlyon——"

"Better known as 'Bernard' a quarter of an hour ago," interpolated the priest, "Lilian grew crimson; but continued—

"Mr. Carlyon does not understand you, and ought not even to think himself insulted in a family whose daughter he has saved from insult."

"Mr. Carlyon has repaid himself a thousandfold," returned the priest, "for striking a couple of blows for Miss Trevelyan, in enlisting her to strike one for him."

"That is true," said Bernard quite radiantly, "whether meant in sincerity or in taunt."

"I told you," said Lilian, turning to him, "that if you came here you would meet some strange people, and I have no doubt you are convinced I was right."

Father Heywood took up a book, and glancing at it for a moment or two, threw it down again, and said, as if the subject had just occurred to him,—

"By the way, Bernard, for I treat you as one of the family now, you are a Protestant, I suppose, as much as anything. Do you come over to us? If so, I will lend you some theological books, which you will find consoling, and confirming, and so forth."

"Francis Rabelais, perhaps," said Carlyon, hardly knowing how to meet Heywood's levity. "Thank you, I have a very good copy."

"Miss Lilian Trevelyan must do the rest," said Heywood, disregarding the answer. "It is a trifling matter to you and me, you know, whether one's bishops make a cross beside their names, or do not; but some people are particular. That, I think, is the only difficulty likely to arise with Uncle Eustace, who has rather strong notions about the pale of the church, and I believe," he added carelessly, "Lilian has given him some *promise*—or was there not something about a curse? How-

ever, that is all easily arranged where people are in earnest." And nodding a pleasant good-bye to the others, he lounged out of the room, humming an air from the "Huguenots."

"Do not speak," said Lilian, eagerly, "I know what you would say; but it would be what hereafter you might wish unsaid."

"I am dumb," said Bernard. "I have said enough to-day," he added tenderly, "and shall never speak again to such happy purpose." With a good deal more to the same effect, which was very satisfactory, no doubt, to Lilian Trevelyan, but might be less so to any other person. It need only be recorded that after a protracted interview, which neither seemed inclined to abridge, though really everything that either had to say had been put into every variety of form, and something sadly like repetition had been going on for a very long time, Bernard and Lilian actually separated, in the pretty words of Mr. Præd's song, "with a kiss and with a prayer." And Bernard little thought how hard he rode as he hastened across the country to Aspen Court.

CHAPTER XVII.

A NIGHT WITH THE SPEAKER.



IT was known that the Cabinet was to fall. The Opposition trumpets, some of them brazen enough, had long been sounding, fierce as those of mosquitoes, around the Ministerial Jericho, whose walls were already heaving and riving. But few knew how near was the grand crash.

The Minister to whom Carlyon had been accredited by his aristocratic friend, was a tall, large, grey-headed, able man, of extreme industry and untiring energy. He was the model of a man of public business. But, far from being a mere red-tapist, he held enlarged and elevated views, and a high sense of principle, for none of which did the keen-sighted public give him much credit. For this there was a reason. The Minister was a haughty man, perfectly confident in the purity and wisdom of his own intentions, and in his ability to carry them out. He knew that with the matters in his own department, not to say with those of half the other *bureaux*, he was as well qualified to

deal as any person in England, and by dint of a tolerably well justified contempt for most of the units with whom he was brought into contact, he gradually acquired a less defensible contempt for those units in the aggregate called a people. He served the nation well, but he cared little for the compliments of his masters, and, happening to be a rich man, still less for their wages and perquisites. When called to public account for any of his actions, he was not only ungracious in his explanation, firing away upon his interrogator as if the latter had maliciously sought to interrupt the business of the country, but he was in the habit of assigning the most technical and routine reasons for acts to which he had really been prompted by high and noble motives. Ever refusing a statesman's explanation when a clerk's was sufficiently plausible, he was estimated by the nation as a clerk, though in reality a statesman. Never was a valuable servant of the people less appreciated, and more unpopular than Francis Selwyn. He was a religious man, also, and not ashamed of his religion, and this did not add to his popularity ; for though, as of course we all know, England is the most pious country in all the world, the possession of personal religion and of a sense of its obligations, by a public man, is vulgarly held to be somewhat incompatible with any very brilliant discharge of a statesman's duty, to say nothing of the withering sneers to which the suspicion of such superstition exposes him from people, who know religion only as something connected with church-rates and the shutting beer-houses in church-time.

Mr. Selwyn received Bernard very kindly, and evinced more interest in ascertaining from him Lord Rookbury's views of the coming crisis than Carlyon anticipated he would display. It seemed strange that any sort of understanding should subsist between two men of such opposite principles and habits. The Earl was a sceptic and a libertine, the Minister a believer and a purist. But they entertained a certain mutual regard, and while Lord Rookbury would lament that a devilish clever fellow like Selwyn would wear that Evangelical starch, and humbug himself with the idea that he believed the cant he talked in Exeter Hall ; Mr. Selwyn would express his sorrow that the fine natural talents of Lord Rookbury should remain so utterly unbaptized into the service of their Giver. And sometimes they would meet, *and have a rattling* theological fight—for Selwyn could give a

good many reasons for the faith that was in him—and in these conflicts always gave his best, while the Earl, who, like a great many other exceedingly irreligious men, was very fond of studying polemics, could hold his own manfully, and indeed came down upon Selwyn with the Fathers, with a force which the Evangelical was not always prepared to meet. So that, utterly despising the Earl's principles, and loathing his practice, Selwyn maintained a great respect for his intellect. Besides which, Lord Rookbury, who was utterly impartial in politics, and would serve his friend, at the whim of the moment, with the profoundest contempt for the public interest or for his own consistency, had done some very useful things for Selwyn and his party.

"Suppose we see the week out, Mr. Carlyon, before troubling you with any business. There will be some hot work in the House, which you may as well see, and I will put you under the gallery."

The state of parties was a feverish one. The budget, eagerly looked for, had been produced, and had satisfied nobody—it was assailable on a hundred points, and defensible only as a whole and as a compromise. On another subject, a strong measure had been demanded by the country, but only a strong speech and a weak measure had been accorded by the government. An aggrieved, or at all events a complaining party, had mustered for a general charge, and their dexterous leader, devising a form of appeal in which the largest number of independent members could join, had made a damaging onslaught upon the ministry, who had been barely saved by their own official votes. An important, though fragmentary motion on the franchise was opposed by the government, and carried against them by a triumphant majority. It was clear that the *coup de grace* must speedily come. Paragraphs appeared, stating that Cabinet Councils were sitting daily for three and four hours, and the "Court Circular" spoke of numerous interviews with the Sovereign. An immense number of rising young men obtained their own consent to be Under-Secretaries under the new *régime* which was coming—the country attorneys rushed to church to pray that a dissolution might be necessary—four Peers became perfectly clamorous at the neglect their claims for promotion had experienced, and one of them wrote an ungrammatical remonstrance, which was malevolently shown at the Lycurgus,

and parodied in an evening paper, whereby the enraged remonstrant became convinced that the world was at an end. Parliamentary officials growled that all this would retard the prorogation, and there would be no getting to the Rhine and Danube before the end of August, when the evenings close in so confoundedly. West-end tradesmen, in their wrath at the injury to the season, wished there was no constitution, and sighed for a despotism with a George the Fourth as Emperor. The funds began to dance up and down in the Threadneedle thermometer, and, in short, England was in a fidget, the England worth speaking of; the people generally being most impertinently unconcerned.

At last the hour came for the last act. Long before four o'clock the entrances to the House of Commons were crowded with sturdy, sneering artisans, who must all have had business to attend to, but who thought proper to leave it in order to see how Members of Parliament looked, on their way to do execution. It was a fine hot afternoon, and many of the Ministers walked to meet their fate. It was curious to hear the growl of recognition with which they were greeted, and the unhesitating interpretation which was put upon the expressions their faces were interpreted to wear.

"Looks quite cocky, don't he? Means to die game, I should say."

"Ah! but look at this one. My eye, isn't he down in the mouth a few?"

"Don't like losing his salary. Small blame to him."

"That's Warpingham. How he grins, as much as to say, I've feathered my nest, so go it, you cripples."

Amid these and other popular criticisms the devoted Ministers entered the House. Selwyn had walked down with Carlyon, and as they crossed from Great George Street an enlightened politician remarked,—

"The tallest one, the oldish cove, that's Selwyn. A blessed proud chap that—the Queen calls him Master Lucifer whenever she speaks to him."

"Not likely," said a pale young man, who had an impression that good manners lingered at court.

"O, but I know it," returns the other. "The young un's his son, whom he's training up in his footsteps, and you see he *walks as haughty as blazes.*"

"Come, now, Selwyn was never married, I know that," says a third man, "for my aunt lived with the family, and he's very religious, and strict like."

"What's that to do with it?" replies the first speaker. "It's those saints that are the worst of the lot,"—and the censor entered into a miscellaneous imprecation on psalm-smiters, pantilers, maw-worms, and other objectionable religionists, which lasted until Selwyn and his companion had got into the lobby. Placing Carlyon in one of the privileged pews below the strangers' gallery, the minister walked up the House, and to his seat on the front row to the Speaker's right, took a despatch box on his knee, and began to master, with practised celerity, the salient points of a subject in which he had just been told that he was to be interrogated.

There had been a great "whip," and the House was very full, but the nation needed not to flatter itself that a public question had assembled four hundred and thirty-seven members at four o'clock. They had been driven in by private influences and agencies, to vote on a private measure—the Choggleby and North Bunkum Union Junction Waterworks Bill. This was merely a plan for giving some twenty thousand people clean and cheap water, in place of some dear and turbid mess supplied by the existing companies, and the latter had of course exerted themselves to get it rejected. The House was hot and angry, and the sun streamed fiercely down, and shareholders and directors were bawling in harsh and vulgar voices (for it is singular to notice how the snobs in the House are called up on these private bills), and denouncing or supporting the scheme with all the grace and courtesy of rival tradesmen. At last the House recollected that it had met to discuss the affairs of the nation, not the dividends of water-jobbers, and shouted for a division. The bill was rejected by 291 to 146, and the Chogglebites and Bumkumites were doomed to another year of dirty water.

Petitions and questions rapidly disposed of, there are cries of "Order," a Minister rises, and the work of the night is on. Then, crowded, and not in the best of temper, the House addresses itself to listen.

Briefly, clearly, and as calmly as if he did not know that the measure he advocated was doomed, the Leader of the House

explained his bill, pointed out its necessity, and its advantages, compared and contrasted it with other schemes for the same purpose, and presented it to the House as a fulfilment of one of the pledges given by Ministers, through the Royal lips, at the opening of the Session. He attempted little display, but in his concluding sentences his voice swelled into loftier cadences as with a significant energy he declared that even should the House come to an unfavourable decision, which he would not anticipate, he should not feel the less certain that he had done his duty. The cheers which followed would have been absurd in their redoubled vehemence, had they been showered upon the speech, and not upon the speaker and the situation.

He was hardly down when one of the staunchest leaders of the Opposition stood at the red box on the other side. He confronted the ministers boldly as became the fearless and honest commoner, lord of half a county, and with a pedigree few lords can show. Lacking the practised composure of the minister, he grew excited, even with the game in his own hands, and the broad, halé face reddened up to the roots of the silver hair. A fine, kindly old man, that county member, and one who would far gladlier have led the whole House after one of his foxes, than have hounded them on to tear down a minister, but he thought he saw duty, and it had been a way with the men of his blood, for eight hundred years, to do it. The House rang again with his lusty old voice, as he denounced the bad measure and the worse cabinet, and moved that the bill be read a second time that day six months.

The Speaker's eye fell right and left with extreme impartiality, now calling up an energetic barrister, bent on a Solicitor-generalship, and now a wealthy shipowner, strong in well-applied sense, stronger in ill-applied aspirates. A professional orator delivered his prepared harangue—it did not fit very well, being an answer to what had not been said, but was otherwise unexceptionable—and another gentleman, primed with champagne, let off a smart speech, which he had got ready for a previous night, but had not been able to make—the jokes missed fire certainly, but so they would have done at any other time. Ireland pronounced against the minister, and enlivened the scene by another little internecine war, in which Munster *scoffed mightily* at, and was scoffed at mightily, by Connaught.

The night wore, and the great guns roared not. Timid cries of "Divide" broke out as two or three bores successively rose.

Watching his opportunity, and springing up after the very stupidest of these, in order that he might snatch and mangle him by way of an opening compliment to the House (which tolerates bores wonderfully, but rejoices to see them tortured), the great Leader of Opposition stood in the battle. A perfect and accomplished debater, calmest when apparently stormiest, with a studied tone for every taunt, and a practised gesture for every gibe. His shaft missed no mark, his arm struck no blow short. He appealed to ancient principles, to historic names, to the honourable traditions of party, to the proud elements of the constitution, and he urged, in accents alternately sonorous and bitter, that for an old principle the advisers of the Crown had substituted a Manchester-made expediency; that they read history backwards, as witches read prayers, and with the same desire, that of raising a destructive fiend; that they had abandoned party traditions for disgraceful hucksterings, and that if they had hitherto abstained from destroying the constitution, it was chiefly because they had hoped to make a better bargain by selling it. With these and a few other gentle imputations, delivered in the most masterly and artistic style of which oratory is capable, and with a glowing eulogium upon the party with which the speaker was advancing to save the country, he concluded one of those dashing and deadly philippics, which are a feature in Parliamentary history.

Ten men rose at once as he sat down, for men get audacious at midnight, and like the Glendoveer, are ready to stand forth in Seeva's sight against the most dreadful Rajah. The Speaker selected one, and Carlyon, in his place in the pew, only waited to see that the chosen member was a dull good man on the Government side.

"If they will hear him," he thought, "I can manage."

And sometimes they will hear. After a brilliant display it is not unrefreshing to have a dullard for a little while. Hence many men get an audience which it is to be hoped they do not misunderstand. The House did not cry the Speaker down—and Carlyon left it.

"To Lincoln's Inn Fields," he said to a smart cabdriver, "as

hard as you can go, and a shilling a minute for every minute under ten."

Heaven help the old women at the crossings that night, if there were any ; but old women, male and female, must be run over sometimes for the good of the country.

In about five-and-twenty minutes later something was put into Francis Selwyn's hand. The bore had just sat down, and another on the opposite side was pleading, amid the impatience of the House, for a very few words only.

"Hear, hear," said the Minister, to the surprise of a good many around. The orator looked gratefully across the House, and really felt sorry that he was going to abuse the man who had interfered for him. Even members of Parliament have human feelings.

Selwyn looked through what had been sent him. It was a pamphlet, with pages turned down and marked. His quick eye saw what was supplied, and for a moment he smiled, as if tempted to use it. But his lip curled the next instant. He leaned across to a subordinate colleague, a lawyer of the readiest and most unhesitating oratory.

"Would you like a brief?" said Selwyn with a meaning look, and holding out the pamphlet. The other seized it, and with the preternatural barrister-skill, further improved by House of Commons practice, extracted all its value in a few seconds.

"O, rather !" said he, in reply to Selwyn, and with an eager determination which made Selwyn laugh.

Down went the bore and up got the ministerial barrister, dashed at the Opposition leader like a falcon, and paid him back sarcasm for sarcasm, and insult for insult, shouted against his shouts, and sneered against his sneers. Coarse but effective, the onslaught told ; but, when brandishing the pamphlet in the air, he brought it down upon the table as impressively as if it were a document he had kept for years to be ready for that night, and amid the derisive cheers of the House, stated that it was a corrected report of a speech delivered not a very long time since by the honourable leader of the Opposition, in which he avowed sentiments utterly hostile to those he had expressed that night : the *coup* told as such things always do. As, in a high, clear voice, the Minister read passage after passage, with *comments of ironical cheering*, re-echoed (as in the Cato case)

“to show that the sarcasm was unfelt,” and the long lines of members waved up and down with excitement, Bernard Carlyon actually began to think that he had done something for the nation. He was a young man, and we must not be too hard upon him for being pleased with himself that he had remembered the mischievous document, the less so that after the division, which took place an hour later, and the ministers were defeated by a majority of fifteen, Francis Selwyn introduced him to three or four of them in the lobby as the gentleman who had brought down the pamphlet, and that in reply to his disclaimer of any merit beyond that of memory, the Leader of the House of Commons, who was a classical scholar, said with a good-natured smile,—

“You have profited by your Eton grammar, Mr. Carlyon.
In tempore venisti, quod omnium est primum.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PERILS OF THE DEEP.



T is due to our friend Mr. Paul Chequerbent to say that when he sat down to the banquet which he gave to himself and Miss Livingstone, in honour of his triumphant acquittal at the bar of justice, he fully intended to depart into the country on the following day. But a dinner, even such a one as can be procured in London, too frequently changes a man's course. Mr. Chequerbent, yielding to the spirit of the convivial board, at which all man's best feelings possess him, expressed his conviction that the kind attention Miss Livingstone had shown him, at a period when such service was most valuable, deserved some other recognition than a mere dinner, and that a very poor one, and he justly remarked that so few people behaved properly in this world that virtue ought not to go unrewarded. He therefore demanded what Angela would like as a memorial of the day, which, if justice were done, would go down to posterity with that of the acquittal of the Seven Bishops.

“Seven bishops! Whatever were they tried for?” asked Angela, whose reading on such matters was restricted to the memoirs of the Scotch gentleman with roses tull his shoon,

Jack the painter, Suil Dhuv the coiner, and such other historical personages, whose cases have been reheard at the foot-lights.

"They were obstinate parties," said Paul, "who always voted against King Charles having any money for his ships, so one day he came down to the House of Commons and seized them, saying, 'Take away those baubles.' The ladies in the ventilator called out that the king ought to have had too much sense to be there, on which Oliver Cromwell held the Speaker down in his chair, and told the soldiers to fire at the ladies."

"Good business," said Angela, whose theatrical eye saw a tableau at once. "Of course the manly soldiers refuse to fire upon helpless women, but shoot at the bishops, who fall on the ground in white dresses left, ladies shrieking in gallery opposite prompt, red coats of soldiers right upper entrance, king with crown and robes in centre. Suddenly the parliament bursts into flames, and curtain down on red fire. I wonder if old Muzzy, who does our first pieces, ever read of it. Write down for me where the story is to be found."

This little parliamentary episode being arranged, Paul reiterated his demand to know what Angela would like.

"O, never mind anything now, Paul, dear," said Miss Livingstone, "the weather will be finer soon, and then you must get me up, regardless of expense, to go to Hampton Court and no end of places, but my bonnet looks very well at present, and so does the blue plaid, especially since I have altered the sleeves, and quite fit to go out in."

"Then I'll tell you what," said Paul, "one day more will not make much difference to my going away, and we'll have an out-to-morrow."

"But you are sure you won't get into any trouble by it?" said Angela, "because that's all nonsense, you know, for the sake of a holiday. I am sure I often look at the bright sky of an evening, about six, and think how nice it would be to go and walk quietly in the fresh air, instead of turning out of the sunlight into a den where one must spend seven or eight hours in the heat, and dust, and smell, and gaslight, exerting and exciting myself till I am ready to drop; but I never was forfeited, for all that."

"I should be forfeited about twenty times a week," said Mr. Chequerbent. "But now look here—where shall we go to-morrow?"

"All places suit this child," said Angela, smiling, "provided she is taken the greatest care of, and everything of the best is provided for her."

"It has been very hot to-day," said Mr. Chequerbent. "If it is like this to-morrow we'll go on the water."

"I am agreeable," said the young lady. "But now, will you mind doing me a favour? Perhaps it will bore you, but bear it for once. I want you to let Mrs. Bong go with us. She's a good old soul, and behaved very well to me when I was out of an engagement, and hardly knew which way to turn. It would be such a treat to her. Do you mind very much?"

"I don't mind at all," said Paul, who was good-nature itself; "but she will look such a thundering Guy, won't she?"

"Not at all," said Angela; "she looks very respectable in private life, and sometimes smartens herself up prodigiously if she happens to have an extra shilling, poor old thing. Once, you know, she was a very fine woman indeed."

"I don't know it," said Paul; "but my father may have heard his grandfather say so."

"Nonsense, now, Paul. When she was Miss Stalkinghorse she was greatly admired by the Duke of Cumberland."

"I know," said Paul; "but he broke off with her before he fought the battle of Culloden in seventeen hundred and forty something, about a hundred and ten years ago. It was very cruel of him—but that was his nature, and she has never heard from him since. However, she shall go with us, if it's only to comfort her. Where does she live?"

"Over the water," said Angela. "I will send her a note to-night, and we will fetch her in the morning. Shall I meet you on the bridge?"

"On Hungerford Bridge at eleven, Miss Livingstone," said Paul; "and be good enough to remember the right one, as I knew an engaged couple who made a similar appointment, and one of them mistook the bridge, so they walked up and down in parallel lines for six hours, one on Hungerford, the other on Waterloo, actually within sight of one another, if they had thought of looking, and then rushed home and indited furious farewells for ever. So think, if you please, of being hungry, and of fording a river without your shoes and stockings, which no young person could better afford to do than you."

"How shockingly rude you are!" said Miss Livingstone, with a little imitation of prudery. "And now put me into a cab and send me away to my work. "No, I will not have any coffee, but I will have some maraschino before I go."

Paul beguiled the night hours by visiting a series of very ungentle entertainments of a musical and dramatic nature, the prices of admission to which varied from twopence to sixpence, and at most of which he followed the customs of the place by taking a great deal of miscellaneous refreshment. At length, which may mean towards two o'clock, he judged it time to go to bed, a feat which he performed at a quaint old inn looking upon Smithfield, and much patronised by farmers and other bucolic persons, whose business is still transacted upon the death-place of Wallace and Wat Tyler. In the morning, after an economical breakfast in a room much like a vault, into which huge men in rough coats were perpetually tramping, and demanding Muster Boggles, Muster Whawp'n, and other friends, and drinking stimulants, on the chance of those gentlemen coming in (which they never did), Paul, feeling a good deal soddened, and not over-delighted with himself, made his way westward. It was a lovely morning, but the sun shone rather more brightly than seemed to Paul in good taste—a fault which people who spend the over-night as he had done are apt to find with weather which makes the virtuous quite radiant. Little Angela was very punctual, and they set off into the wilds of Surrey in quest of Mrs. Bong.

In a tiny, ill-built cottage, in the middle of a large, dreary nursery-garden, Mrs. Bong resided. As they entered the gate, which was an enormous distance from the house, a tremendous voice came down upon the wind, and bore a greeting which might have been heard through a storm. Angela's pleasant little organ was exerted in return, but was utterly inaudible by her friend until the space between them had been diminished by a good half, when, by dint of extreme straining, Angy contrived to say,—

"Sorry you've got such a bad cold. You can only whisper."

"Come along, you saucy thing," roared Mrs. Bong with a kindly smile, strangely at variance with that portentous voice. And as they approached, Paul could quite make out that she *must have been*, as Angela had said, an exceedingly fine woman

in her time. The commanding figure was not entirely unpreserved, and the face, worn as it had been by a hundred troubles and a thousand coats of bad rouge, retained a pleasant expression. The eyes were still bright, and there was a sort of melancholy animation which seemed to say that the poor woman was heartily tired of life's drama, but that she would play her part with spirit until the last long "wait."

"And so you have found the old lady at last," said Mrs. Bong, whose voice toned down to manageable thunder as soon as she got her visitors into the smallest room that ever held a sofa-bedstead, a great black chest of drawers, and a mighty arm-chair, besides some ordinary and puny furniture. "And now sit down; you get upon the sofa, sir, and you here, Angy. And now, will you have some beer after your walk? Don't say no if you'd rather not."

"We don't know the liquid," said Angela.

"Never heard of it," said Paul. "But still one would like to learn; and if it is anything cool and refreshing, we are not too proud to try it."

In a minute a not over clean but handsome lad was vigorously dragged from an out-house, a squealing, dusty kitten was torn from one of his hands and a jug thrust into the other before he could well shut his mouth after his first astonishment, and his aunt's finger indicated a solitary house with a new blue sign-board appended thereto. He was started at full speed, but Paul suddenly dashed after him.

"Halt, young Shaver," cried Mr. Chequerbent, arresting him, and putting a shilling into his hand. "Mind you say that the beer is for me, the Right Reverend the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, and give them this, and then you'll get it good. Now cut." And he went back to the room, to which his hostess had not yet returned.

"What were you saying to the poor boy, Paul?" asked Angela.

"Oh, nothing; only one don't want the old girl to be spending her money for us; I dare say she has not too much of it. But tell her to make haste and get ready."

"Put a pin through your nose and look sharp, Aunty Bong," cried Angela. "I'll come and quicken you."

Left to himself, Paul took a survey of the contents of the apartment. On the walls were likenesses of the Reform Minis-

ters, published at the time they earned that imposing name. The Lord Grey was scowling frightfully, and menacing the throne with a huge roll of parchment, inscribed THE BIL ; the Lord Brougham, in a wig, was waving over his head, as beseeemed his energetic nature, another roll, lettered WHOLE BIL ; while the Lord John Russell was indignantly slapping his bosom with a third vast parchment, marked AND NOTHING BUT, three parliamentary feats which Mr. Hansard shamefully omits to chronicle. The room was littered in every conceivable way. Half-a-dozen yellow-covered play-books, much worn, lay about, and all the lines belonging to Mrs. Bong's parts were scored under for convenient study. There was a dream-book, stated to be a correct reprint from one which the Emperor Napoleon always consulted on the eve of battle, and therefore especially useful to a lady ; and there were some treatises on crochet, improved by the various figures being filled up with eyes and noses, and adorned with legs and arms, by the amateur labours of visitors. And the apartment was further enlivened with a mass of tarletan, soiled satin shoes, dress linings with thread all over them, play-bills, pink stockings, various belts, half a cookery book, a basket of greens, and some gold and silver trimming, divers ginger-beer bottles, and a few other trifles. But presently the Shaver returned with the fluid he had been sent to fetch, and looked very wistfully at the wet halfpence constituting the change, which he honestly paid over to Paul.

"You may keep that, sir," said Paul, reading the boy's look ; "but conditionally, mind me, on your not laying any of it out in jewellery or race-horses, which bring so many young men to destruction."

The Shaver grinned prodigiously, and again rushed off ; and from his walking about late in the day with no eyelashes to speak of, it has been surmised that he effected an ineligible investment in gunpowder. But he was seen no more until after his aunt and her visitors departed.

Paul and his companions made for the Borough, where he insisted on stopping to buy himself a flat, shining, sailor's hat. They reached the London Bridge railway-station, and then Mr. Chequerbent announced that he proposed to go to Gravesend, and demanded what time his friends must be in town to discharge their duties to the public. Mrs. Bong's

theatre did not open for the season until next Monday, so she was sorry to say she was her own mistress.

"So am I," said Angela, "for a wonder, for there is a ben to-night, and I am in neither of the pieces."

"Who's Ben?" asked Paul, puzzled.

"I am not sure whose," replied Angela, not seeing that he was mystified, "but I think it's the Jovial Vaccinators and Friendly Confluent Scarlatinas who have taken the house between them, and they have got up the *Surgeon of Paris*, the *Black Doctor*, and the ballet of *St. Vitus's Dance*, as appropriate to the occasion. They always have a good benefit."

"Ben—benefit—*video, carpo, twiggo*," said Paul; and away they went for the city of shrimps.

"And how are you getting on, aunty?" asked Angela, as soon as she was ensconced in a corner of one of the large carriages.

"Oh, pretty well, my dear," said Mrs. Bong, in deep and melancholy tones. "The money is regular, such as it is; but it is hard work to earn it. For the last six weeks, and till we closed, I headed a conquering army and also a band of brigands every night, with five fights; but that's nothing. But I had to be carried over the rocks, tied on a wild horse, which with my weight is rather nervous business; and I have had to double a part which poor little Mrs. Surchin was obliged to give up, being as ladies do not wish to be when they have to ride on an elephant, and slide down by his trunk. Then we have a nautical piece three nights a-week, and I have rather a tiresome bit in that. I have to hang from the mast, in a storm, while the ship rolls and pitches up and down, and this goes on as long as the applause comes. One evening they kept me swinging for ten minutes—and the week before last the thing broke, and I fell through a trap and bruised myself sadly. I was obliged to lay up one night, but they stopped my salary, and that won't do, you know, with five mouths to feed, so I crawled to work again directly. And our rehearsals are very heavy, with so much spectacle; and I fully expect to break my limbs one of these mornings out of a cockle-shell of a car which they are trying to make six horses bring in on their backs, at an awful height, and me in it—the poor things kick so and get so unmercifully beaten; but Brax swears it is as safe as a cradle—a cradle on the tree-top, I tell him. However, it's only slavery for life, that's one

comfort, and it'll be all the same a hundred years hence, that's another."

"By Jove!" said Paul. And he became thoughtful for full three minutes, considering how hard some people worked for a morsel of bread. But his meditations did not last, and he rattled away in his usual style until they reached Gravesend.

"We'll dine at Wates's," said Mr. Chequerbent, "and in the meantime we'll embark on the bosom of the deep. I hope you are good sailors."

Having ordered dinner, Paul sallied forth upon the little pier in front of the hotel, and was beset by half a dozen owners of boats, each of whom, with that good feeling peculiar to the race, assured him that every one of the rival candidates was a rascal, had no number or licence, kept an unsafe vessel, and was generally, hopelessly, and utterly worthless. But Paul knew his men, and speedily slanged them into tolerable silence. He made choice of a clean boat, handed the ladies in, and immediately became intensely nautical.

"You may sheer off, skipper," he observed to the boatman, as soon as the sail was set, "I shan't want you."

"Good gracious, Paul," said Angela, "you mean to take the man, I hope. I am certain you can't manage the boat. O law!" and she really looked frightened.

"I'd better go with you, Sir," said the man.

"Nonsense," said Mr. Chequerbent, indignantly. "Do you think I can't manage a bit of a boat like this? I'd sail her to Margate with my eyes shut." And he persisted in turning out the man, and Paul taking the tiller in hand, the boat glided from the pier.

"No luck about her," shouted one of the disappointed candidates. "Find her way to the bottom, I should say."

A light breeze caught the sail, and they went pleasantly enough down the river. The roar of a Scotch steamboat was Angela's first fright; but Paul managed to give the monster a wide berth, and they danced gaily in the waves of her wake. And he got pretty decently away from the dark hulk of an emigrant vessel lying near. Paul began to be convinced that he was a first-rate pilot, and proceeded to discourse very *learnedly* to the ladies upon the mysteries of navigation. On

went the little boat merrily, and a little nautical song from the pretty actress was introduced with much appropriateness.

"How glorious to be upon the waters, and feel that you ride them as their master!" said Paul, heroically. "After which sentiment I will refresh myself with a cigar—smoke not disagreeable to you, Mrs. Bong—rather like it than not, of course—so do you, Miss Livingstone—very good. Then here goes." And he made fast the tiller, while he bent forward to get his paletot, which he had tossed into the bow.

As he was fumbling for his light, a tremendous shout from Mrs. Bong came upon his ear, and it was followed by a scream from Angela. He leaped up, and to his especial dismay, beheld a steam-tug dragging along a huge vessel, and bearing directly down upon them, while a perfect storm of curses broke from the deck of the tug, with an order which would have been perfectly intelligible to a seaman, but which, in Paul's state of fluster, sounded only like a command to go to a very bad place indeed. Nearer and nearer came the tug, Mrs. Bong thundering her mandates to it to get out of the way, and Angela screaming and clutching at everything in turn in the vain hope of doing some good. Paul made a leap at the main sheet, but missed his footing and fell down, and Angela, seeing what he intended, instantly grasped the rope, and pulled it into an unmanageable knot, at which Paul, as soon as he could recover himself, hauled and swore in vain. Then was a moment of intense terror for them all, and the next, the tug struck the boat amidships, and a crash was heard, at which Mrs. Bong roared in her fright, while Angela, white as ashes, trembled like an aspen leaf, and Paul, in a mingled state of wrath, remorse, and fear, stamped, raved, and looked helplessly around. In another instant they would be under the roaring paddles of the steamer. It was but a moment, however, for the tug's men, not altogether unaccustomed to such scenes, were on the alert, an enormous grappling iron was dashed into the boat, and she was brought up alongside. But the crash had been so severe, that she was no longer seaworthy, and the water began to pour in through the fissure.

"We are sinking—we are sinking! Save us!—oh, save us, if ye be men and sailors," exclaimed Angela, her stage recollections coming back to her in the hour of need.

They told better on the Thames than in the magistrate's

room, and the captain of the tug, sorely reluctant, however, issued the orders to ease and to stop her. Ropes were thrown out, and in a few minutes the party had scrambled upon the dirty deck of the tug. Angela immediately fainted, and Paul, in his efforts to restore her, lost a considerable part of the sarcasms which were lavished upon him by the crew.

CHAPTER XIX.

LILIAN'S WHITE UNCLE.



USTACE TREVELYAN was the third member of the group assembled in the drawing-room at Lynfield Magna on the day of Carlyon's first visit, and he was alluded to by Mr. Heywood, in the subsequent and memorable interview, as one whose consent must be obtained to the engagement of Lilian and Bernard. If the death-like ashiness of that man's features be remembered, it is probable that his history will be read.

Well-born, Eustace Trevelyan was the son of parents whose property, though considerable, was not so large as to enable their sons to dispense with professions. Sensitive and amiable, but remarkable neither for high intellect nor a vigorous frame, Eustace passed the ordeal of a public school with considerable suffering, and without gaining the mental or the physical distinction, either of which, attained in that noble but perilous arena, sends forward the young victor with so proud a step to the sterner battle of life. He was weak at wrenching out the rich meaning from the subtle Greek chorus, slow at planting the rattling facer which brings out those shrill plaudits from the schoolboy ring. His nature was to avoid competition of every kind, and he would make way for the youngest rival who displayed pluck and push. The boys despised, the masters tolerated him. He was, of course, taken in hand three or four times by teachers, who can do and will do so much for a boy with capabilities, but on the non-elastic nature of Eustace the most earnest effort was wasted. It was found useless to apply the ordinary awakening process which so often makes a *neglected*, spoiled, or careless lad discover how much he can *do*, and how particularly essential it is to his comforts that he

should do it. Eustace wept, and struggled to please—for it was his tutor's smile more than his praise that the boy desired—but it was not in him, and a night's toil produced nothing but English that was vicious, and Latin that was downright criminal. The kindest remonstrance was urged, the most patient assistance was given, and Eustace felt grateful, wiped his red eyes, and went humbly to work, but Juvenal became aimless, and Sophocles meaningless, in the mouth of their feeble interpreter. Punishment was inflicted, not wantonly, but as one of the experiments which, when all else has failed, it is but justice to try—Eustace writhed, but the stimulant put no new energy into him. Then there was an end of the matter—he was let alone; and simply cared for. What more can a teacher do with such a mind—a teacher with a hundred minds to cultivate? For ninety-nine of that hundred, the discipline of the great school is salutary and bracing—Eustace was the hundredth, and the exception. The great school did him no good, and its system embittered his young life. When, in after years, he reflected upon this, he had not the philosophy to be consoled by the recollection that all systems must work unpleasantly for somebody, and that so small a minority as he represented ought to rejoice that the majority was so large, instead of complaining of its own unhappiness—but then it has been said that he was not remarkable for his intellect.

Eustace was happier at Oxford, as was natural. There the mildest man can remain unmolested, if he pleases; and Eustace was, by dint of hard teaching, a proficient in the art of keeping out of the way of other people. The calm, grand old university was very kind to him, in the way he most wished, that is, he was not troubled. At school, he had been compelled, at times, to run, to row, and even to fight, but at college there is no compulsion to become athletic against your will. He neither read hard nor gave wine-parties—was neither medallist nor pugilist—neither wrangled nor chaffed. He was simply quiet and inoffensive, and he was allowed to remain so.

A profession, as has been said, was necessary for him, and there was a family living, of some value, marked down as his. He duly received holy orders, and was as duly inducted. And although the Reverend Eustace Trevelyan was not the man to fight the Church's battles, to clear new areas of action for her,

and to maintain them against all comers, qualities which, it would seem, become day by day more necessary in the servants of the altar, which must be missionary, or ruins, his gentle nature and conciliating disposition made the quiet duties of his rural parish pleasant enough to the meek priest. Yet, even in the retired district committed to him, there occurred scenes which he would gladly have avoided, strife which disquieted the interposing pastor more than the brawling rivals; death-beds, where his calm formulas and common-place consolations became mockeries in the presence of solemn scepticism and of maddening remorse. Eustace would retire from such conflicts, conscious that he had been neither dignified, nor wise, nor successful; and with a bewildered brain and fluttering nerves, would fling himself down in his garden, and repine that antagonism was a condition of useful existence, and a condition that even uselessness could not escape.

But a more perturbed lot was destined to Eustace Trevelyan, and in due time it fell to his hand. The petty irritations, the darker incidents of his ministration, troubled him but for a time, for the same nature which bade him shun conflict bade him also shun its memories; and he gradually trained himself, not unsuccessfully, to the habit which dismisses the things of yesterday, and looks forward. He was calm, but not content. He distrusted himself, his intellect, and his energies, and at times he even found a humiliating comfort in the consideration of his own insignificance. He was nothing—he was nobody. This was at least a pledge that, acquit himself poorly, meanly as he might, there was no circle of spectators to shout derision at him, no grave superior to regard him with pitying contempt. He was no longer at school. He lived on as it were by sufferance, but he was unwatched except by his own carking, self-reproaching spirit, which brought vague charges against itself, hints, and whispers, and an ever-recurring consciousness of short-comings and unworthiness. Nor had the priest yet learned, even in the place whence he taught, how all such voices can be silenced. He proclaimed the language of the oracle, but it fell meaningless upon his own ear. During this period of his life, Eustace's being was an unhealthy stagnation, at times disturbed, but only that the stagnant waters might *again sleep in their sullen repose.*

But the waters were troubled at last, though not for healing. There returned to his estate in Trevelyan's parish a gentleman who had long resided abroad, that his property might recover itself from the effect of the share its owner had taken in certain revels—fashionable when a Regent set the fashion. The property was by no means clear again, for Sir Frederic Larrendon had essayed to live with his betters, and Corinth is an expensive locality. But there was enough for the shattered man, once a blood, and twice a dandy, but now a querulous chalkstony valetudinarian—enough for his beautiful, black-browed, black-eyed, Frenchified daughter, who came with no good grace from her Boulogne circle of scampish pleasantness to rusticate in an English country-house. Flora Larrendon liked adoration murmured from under moustaches, and forgave it for being scented with cigar smoke and seasoned with *double entendre*. Fearless, unhesitating, and unabashed, she was the star of a French watering-place, with its *écarté*, intrigue, and shiftiness; but in an English country town—all propriety, spite, and Sunday-schools—Flora's splendid black hair streamed like the hair of a comet. The sensation made by the dashing Miss Larrendon was painful, and the sentiment she excited was something like that of the fashionable young woman in the Spectator, who went to a quiet church in such style that one very wise old lady said she ought to have been taken up.

Flora Larrendon was doomed to her rural seclusion, at least until her wearisome and exacting father should, like other wicked, be at rest, or, at all events, cease from troubling. But amusement was necessary, and she looked round for it. Her state must have been desperate when she could find no better game than the poor clergyman. Really, however, she was reduced to Eustace, or plain and ornamental needle-work, for there was nobody else to speak to. The doctor of the town was sixty, and of the two lawyers, who were gentlemen, one had six children, and the other was newly married to a wife whom he liked. There were no country houses within reasonable distance, and in fact Eustace was the only educated man within reach. Flora turned her superb eyes upon Eustace, and almost felt compassion towards him for the extreme helplessness with which he instantly dropped at her feet. As usual, the man made no fight at all.

All that Eustace wanted, and felt he wanted in himself, he

found in Flora Larrendon. His slower intellect, his timidity, his uncertainty, were all rebuked, but not, poor fellow, unpleasantly, in the presence of her quickness, courage, and decision. She read him at a glance, and needed not to notice twice his nervous entry into her presence, his colour heightening at the shortest notice, or his wordy and unprecise speeches, to see how fragile a person was her spiritual pastor and master. Her real difficulty was to avoid frightening him by too much encouragement, for she had quite perception enough to know that he was a gentleman, and sensitive, and that a very little extra-demonstration would scatter the flirtation to the winds. But the good Flora managed very well, and Eustace loved for the first and only time in his life. I wish that Flora had been a better girl, for she did great good to Trevelyan.

The passion awoke him. He had hitherto been little better than a maundering boy ; he became a man ; he turned a new face upon the world, and confronted that which the world turned upon him, physically as well as morally. The step grew more steady, the eye more resolute, the voice more decided. The moral nature hardened into firmness. Eustace began to do his duty as one who had himself to answer to, but who was not afraid of the tribunal. He submitted less to dictation from others, and insisted more upon his position and dignity. The priest asserted himself, and demanded reverence for his credentials. The change was sudden, and though there were few subtle-souled psychologists in his parish, the effect was noted. In a less sensitive nature than that of Trevelyan it would have been less observable. This elevation and improvement Eustace owed to Flora Larrendon. But in her presence there was little of it seen ; there Eustace was what he had been on their first interview. It would seem as if they had then and at once fallen into relative attitudes, which were not to be disturbed ; and this Eustace himself felt, and would not have changed it if he could. He knew that he was stronger as against the world, and he was content to owe that strength to the woman before him. He loved, and yet was grateful. The paradox was in his nature : it will not be found in that of many men.

Far less strange was the fact that his love reacted. When the flirt took the parson in hand, it was a heartless snatch at a victim. *When Flora and Trevelyan became intimate, and frequent inter-*

views enabled the gentle priest in some degree to unveil the better part of his nature, Flora Larrendon, in her turn, was rebuked. It had so chanced that in her life she had never come in contact with a character like Trevelyan's. Its externals were ridiculous, especially to a girl educated as Flora had been, but when these were penetrated there was something better beyond. She had read through the diamond cement with which various other natures had been faced, and had found rubbish behind the glitter. Breaking through the opaque crust which surrounded the real character of Eustace, she found—among other trifles—a heart. As with the name of the architect of the Pyramid, graven on the marble, over which lay the plaster inscribed with the title of the tyrant who commanded the edifice, when time had removed the worthless inscription, the writing worthy of honour was revealed. And Flora read it, and her old solace, her French novels, were somewhat neglected, and she began to speak more gently to that good-for-nothing old father.

Here might have ensued a pleasant story—how the two spirits, mutually improving and assisting one another, became one, and how the two faiths were pledged, and how Eustace, growing more manly, and Flora more womanly, they married, and presenting nearly the best type of marriage and its object, made each other's happiness thenceforth, and until the passing bell. But it was not to be so.

They were all but formally plighted. Flora met him on his ministerial rounds in the peasant's cottage, in the village school, by the bed of sickness, and was zealously taming her wild heart to his loving hand. One day he had ridden to some distance to visit a brother clergyman, and was returning home somewhat rapidly in the twilight when his horse started and flung away from an object lying in the road. Trevelyan had reined in and dismounted to make out the cause of the animal's fear before he noticed that a gate which opened into the road had swung across it, and that the field was one of Sir Frederic Larrendon's. Flora, a fearless rider, had been aware of the hour at which he would return, and had set out to meet him. It could be but matter of surmise that she had dashed across the field instead of taking the bridle lane, that she had put her horse at the gate, and that he, deceived by the approaching shadows, had struck it, and it had swung open. At least so said those who sought to

disengage the body of Flora from the clutch of the half-maniac priest, kneeling, raving, and blaspheming, if the wild noises wrung from torture have a guilty meaning.

"The hair is long, and thin, and grey, but its greyness, and a stoop, manifest even while he is sitting, seem the traces of suffering rather than of age. But the strangest characteristic of his face is its utter bloodlessness. Its whiteness is startling, and troubles the eye. It is a nearer approach to the ashiness of death than we might deem that life could make and live." So was Eustace Trevelyan described, but many years had then rolled over his head.

There were new phases of trouble for that man. Strangely, as some may think, when the first shock and agony were over, Eustace regained his calmness with no long delay. He would not leave his parish, though an exchange was offered him, and though his duties would daily lead him where the memories of his sorrow must spring up at every turn. He spoke much and often, and never hesitated to speak of her who was gone, or even to dwell upon the fearful event. Her tomb was his especial charge, and he covered it with inscriptions. These were all in the ancient languages, and were read by few in that obscure country town; but one who could interpret them would have found that they all spoke of gloom, of sadness, and of terror. The grave for him who had traced these lines was the mansion, not the door. One line was repeated on all four sides of the tomb. It was this—*Verè tremendum est mortis sacramentum*. But there was no one to ponder on the words or to muse on the process which might be seething and rending the brain which had suggested them.

The pastor did his work, and, as it appeared to those among whom he laboured, well. The sick were tended, the poor were visited, and the Eternal Truths were spoken; nor did Eustace shun the secular portion of a country clergyman's duty: offenders were pointed out to the law, and the hardness of those who would grind the faces of the pauper was checked at the instance of his spiritual protector. And when, after about a year's time, it was suddenly bruited about that Mr. Trevelyan had crossed the country to his bishop's palace, and entering his lordship's presence in his surplice, had slipped it off before his bewildered superior, and casting himself on his knees, had prayed to be

relieved of his ordination vows, none were more astonished than the flock which had beheld him doing his pastoral work so regularly and efficiently.

Such a scene, however, did take place. Eustace had thrown himself at the feet of his bishop, and implored that hands which had bound on earth might loose on earth, and that the credentials by virtue of which he spoke with authority might be cancelled. The good bishop was puzzled, for though the prayer was wild, and its being granted was impossible, the reasons the suitor assigned were such as no man could treat lightly. Had he uttered one incoherent sentence the bishop could have summoned assistance, but Trevelyan, at the episcopal foot, spoke better than he had ever spoken in his life, and the kindly-natured prelate had something of the sensitiveness of Eustace himself, and recoiled from the idea of transferring to a mad doctor a man who in admirable and earnest language was pleading to have a weight taken off which he felt was crushing him—to be relieved of a Nessus robe which was burning into his vitals. His Lordship could only raise Eustace from the ground and beg him to take advice as to the state of his nerves.

Eustace Trevelyan was, however, mad.

He was watched, and finally placed under restraint, but it was one of the mildest kind, for he had always been gentle, and his phase of insanity, as it developed itself, was one of sadness and frequent terror. The thought of his ordination vows came upon him but seldom, for a newer and a more material fact had been superadded: it was the fear which had crouched and whispered in those dead languages on the tomb of the lost one—the fear of Death. To this terror he yielded himself with a species of involuntary readiness. He spoke of it, he read of it, he surrounded himself with all that might remind him of it, and yet it would throw him into paroxysms like those which shake the frame of the victim to hydrophobia when the splash of water is heard or its surging seen. It was the fear of the death itself, and not of what might be beyond, that tortured him. He would sit for hours reciting passages with which his religious avocation had stored his memory, and in which the tomb is spoken of as a prison-house, as a pit, as a place of darkness and forgetfulness. And these he would vary with verses, sung in a moaning key, and culled from all those grim hymns with which unauthorized

expounders have through years terrified young and sensitive minds by a cruel mingling of the material and the spiritual ; those lyrics, too coarse for the Greek mythology, too grovelling for the worshipper of Odin, but accepted as Christian interpretations of the most refined and most exalted mysteries. These Eustace Trevelyan would mutter and moan over for hours ; but he was not content with mere words ; he would eagerly select pictures and other representations of mortality, and with these he would adorn his apartment, to the very curtains of his bed, making gentle reproach if any one sought to remove them ; and the relics of mortality itself had even a greater attraction for the diseased brain. At first it was thought well to oppose this morbid taste, but the extreme suffering into which the poor creature was thrown by any such demonstrations, and the abject weakness with which he petitioned to have back his ghastly toys, prevented any prohibition being continued.

Do you remember the skeleton which sat in Aspen Court ?

Not that Eustace Trevelyan sank into imbecility. When, for the time, he was relieved from the death-terror, he was calm and mild in his manner, neither isolating himself from those with whom he dwelt, nor abiding silently among them, as is the manner with many who are similarly afflicted. The original character of his intellect seemed to be preserved in its ruins. Eustace still shunned all opposition, and in compliance with the wish of others would remain with them, converse with them, and even bear his part with a semblance of cheerfulness, which sometimes deceived a casual observer. But it was sorrowful to note that all that he did seemed prompted, not by his own will, but by an instinctive desire to avoid offending, and even more sorrowful to watch the furtive glance which he would direct towards the face of any of his companions, if he imagined that he had done anything to cross their wishes. When he passed into the charge of Lilian, under circumstances which will be explained by-and-by, it became a study and a duty with her to observe these eager, timid glances, and to meet them with a ready and reassuring smile, until at length poor Eustace acquired a child-like habit of looking to Lilian for approbation of his acts and words, a habit hardly less piteous than his previous apprehensions. Mr. Heywood also treated him with exceeding consideration ; but then the feminine tenderness and the vigilant

watch were wanting, and at times the intellectual man forgot the need of his helpless brother, and the full, proud eye fell coldly on Trevelyan, who would quiver under its gaze. But never was an unhappy and bereaved man more kindly cared for than Eustace under the guardianship in which we found him.

One feature more in his insanity was connected with his terror of death, and that was his clinging to what seemed to hold most promise of life. To the young, and especially to children, Eustace attached himself, as if in their society were some charm against what he dreaded so deeply. His gentle manners easily won the youngest to his side, and if permitted, he would sit for hours in such companionship, soothed in being allowed to hold some little hand in his, and almost happy if a joyous child would nestle by him, or make a pillow of his knee. And it was chiefly to children of that nature that his affections swayed—those whose life was most a sport, and in whose veins the healthful blood ran merriest. For—and more than one pang was caused by the strange antipathy—he would withdraw from the caress of a child whose pallor or pensiveness seemed to give note that its days might not be long with us. And slight as was the manifestation, and timidly as Eustace would edge away, his gesture, which might have something of prophecy in it, would set a mother's heart throbbing wildly, and send her from his presence in a passion of tears.

His history has been sketched. In himself a man of no mark, Eustace might under ordinary circumstances have plodded his undistinguished way through life, neither honoured nor happy, but with perhaps something more and something less of suffering than falls to those at once less sensitive and less forgetful. But his being, alternately agitated and stagnant, was once stirred to its depths, and its vitality, suddenly put fully forth, vindicated itself for that once, and then ceased for ever. In some old book of sea travel, there is a story which may parallel the case of Eustace Trevelyan. Becalmed at evening in one of those western seas, and beguiling the weary time as they might, the sailors brought on their deck a vessel of the phosphoric water in which they were floating. The luminous appearance ceased on the withdrawing the water from the deep, and the vessel stood dark among them. But there was a chemist on board, who fetched from his chest a phial of some potent acid, and poured it

into the black water. In an instant, and roused into an intolerable agony by that deadly liquid, the chaos of sea insects in the vessel put forth their myriad lights, united in one intense and lustrous sparkle—and were dark. No chemist's charm could ever wake them again.

CHAPTER XX.

A PARTY AT THE TEMPLE OF JANUS.



T was very good of the Marquis and Marchioness of Rotherhithe to keep open house at this period of the political crisis, for they both detest crowds, and have been actually known, after twenty years of marriage, to spend a whole month in one of their country-seats without a single visitor, and in what they are intrepid enough to call, and, it is believed, deluded enough to think, the enjoyment of one another's society. It is hardly necessary to say that the world did its amiable utmost to affix a disagreeable significance to their matrimonial amity. First, it was urged that they were stingy, but the good-natured, open-handed couple speedily lived down this scandal. Then, something was hinted about the state of the Marquis's intellect, and little Baldy Curlew, whose mission, in this world, is to account for things, discovered that a great aunt of the family had, in the year 1773, been under restraint, which, as times go, was almost enough to establish the desired conclusion. But, unluckily for Curlew, the Marquis came out with a mathematical treatise which set all the universities of Europe assailing him with eulogies and diplomas. Then people said it must be the Marchioness, and speculated whether she kept out of society for fear of meeting some only man she had really loved; but this hypothesis was inconveniently met by the utter impossibility of fixing upon the dreaded man, with any decent show of probability. Next, the Rotherhithes were suspected of religion, and both St. Barnabas's and Exeter Hall were closely watched by the social police, but no criminating evidence, Tractarian or Evangelical, could be obtained; while on the other hand, the unconscious couple attended Ascot and the Opera with much regularity. So the solution was left to *time*, and the world is quite certain that one of these days the

truth will come out. Of course it never occurred to the world to attribute the phenomenon to its real cause, but the simple fact was, that the Marquis was sincerely attached to his wife, that the Marchioness loved him very earnestly, and that they were both accomplished people ; he having a good deal of the student's nature, and she liking best that which best pleased him. Anxious to avoid personality, I will not say a great deal about people whose infirmity is not so common as to prevent their being easily recognised, but it is fair to record, that among the innumerable sacrifices made by patriots at the period of the crisis, that of the Rotherhithes, who held all crowds to be a bore, was not the smallest, as will be admitted by those who recollect that at the same eventful date, several expectant statesmen sacrificed their previous principles.

It was, however, but common charity on the part of the Rotherhithes to offer a neutral ground, where men could meet their friends and enemies without being compromised. There was a mass of bewildered politicians, who, just then, could go nowhere with safety. The various leaders, on both sides kept their doors shut, meditated a little on their intended policy, and a great deal on speeches explanatory thereof. To the houses of avowed partizans, of lesser note, it was of course dangerous to go until patriotism saw its way. But Rotherhithe House was a harbour of refuge, where the political men-of-war could lie at anchor, and indeed lie in any way that occurred to them. The Marquis had politics, but they were in his proxy, and his proxy was in the hands of a good and great man, in whose keeping many a good and small man's conscience was better placed than if its owner had retained it. The Marchioness had more decided politics, but they were chiefly foreign and very impartial. She cultivated refugees of all kinds. So that a man had run away from something, the dear Marchioness cared little from which side he had escaped. She was Britannia in miniature. Poles, Carlists, Magyars, Jesuits, Reds, Whites, and Blacks, were sure of a place under the Rotherhithe ægis. And the story of each victim in succession produced its due effect on her kindly nature, and she is said to have rather pestered the Foreign Secretary with the startling revelations brought over by the polyglot *protégés*, who supplied her with new and variously coloured light upon European interests. But

neither Lord Rotherhithe nor his wife was a party adherent, and their house was one which the most timid time-server could haunt without fear of consequences. And when the crisis came, and the Cabinet fell, the Rotherhithes, who had not given a dozen dinners during the season, fairly set Rotherhithe House open. It was rather supposed that the Earl of Rookbury, who delighted in moving about in such gatherings as a crisis assembles, and tormenting those who were already afflicted, had counselled the Rotherhithes to this hospitality. For he was a sportsman of the atrocious class, who strew food for the poor birds, and then fire upon them, inhospitably.

The Rotherhithes had "entertained a small and select party at dinner;" and among the entertained people were Lord Rookbury and Francis Selwyn, who, as usual, had a theological fight, this time on the Article on Justification, in which, as Selwyn was getting the advantage, Lord Rookbury went away to hear an act of Lucrezia Borgia. There was also a new bishop there, a very handsome man, who took no part in the controversy, and perhaps listened with the faintest possible curl of his fine lip, as a professional *will* when amateurs go to work. Next to his Lordship had sat the dandy democrat, Clavering Dorset, of whom the bishop had been a little afraid, knowing that on the subject of religion and aristocracy, Dorset's avowed faith, like the Book of Esther, contained no such word as God or Lord. But then Clavering had behaved with exceeding propriety, and had gone so far in agreeing with the bishop on the topic of education, and likewise on that of the Philharmonic Concerts, that his Lordship was quite pleased, and thought in his heart, that if the people were led by no worse men than Dorset, they could not go so very wrong but that sermons and church extension might do the rest. There were a few other people of quiet note, and the Rotherhithes would have been tolerably pleased with the dinner, but that a crowd was to come in later.

The rooms looked very well when filled. People said that the house might be improved by taking out at least half the sculpture, and lightening those heavy lines in the elaborate ceiling of the principal saloon, and hanging the large painting where it could not be seen so well; and further by keeping out Baldy Curlew, and all the men who talk to him in a low voice on *landings*, and give a *mouchard* air to their proceedings. But Rother-

hithe House is one of the best houses in London, and this evening its statues, and its flowers, and its soft lights, and its music, and about three hundred people, "left nothing to be desired," as people say, except, perhaps, the absence of Baldy Curlew, whose mission is to account for things.

Selwyn had good-naturedly got an evening invitation for his young Secretary, who had commenced his duties, and had given some satisfaction to his chief by the tact with which he had dismissed a jobbing deputation, whom it would have been inconvenient to the ex-minister to receive. Carlyon had managed to convey such intense regrets on the part of Selwyn that he could not see the party, and had so succeeded in impressing upon them that, if there were one subject in the world to which the Minister devoted mornings of study and nights of reflection, that subject was the best way in which Eel-Pie Island could be made a naval depôt, that the courtesy of Selwyn had been trumpeted at half a dozen vestry meetings. And the feat did the more credit to the Minister and to the Secretary, seeing that the former had utterly forgotten the appointment until the deputation was announced, and the latter had only time to catch a few hurried words from Selwyn and to get up the points from the Eel-Pie memorial as he walked down stairs to turn the memorialists out. Bernard had, therefore, honestly earned his card for the Marchioness's party.

That amiable person had also extended her invitations to all her presentable refugees, and there were a good many picturesque heads and well-waxed moustaches sprinkled among the party, and much French and Italian swelled the miscellaneous murmur which, varied by pleasant feminine laughs, came upon the ear as one ascended the grand staircase. As Bernard went up, Lord Rookbury, who had only waited to see Grisi poison her son, and was now marking the people who arrived, called to him.

"Well, Mr. Carlyon. Constructing a new ministry, eh? What do you keep for yourself?"

"I thought of asking your Lordship what you considered me fit for," said Bernard.

"Ah! that's quite another matter. Suppose you take the colonies—they will improve you in geography, and as nobody cares about them, any little blunder at starting will do no great

harm. There's always a run for the colonies when there's a change—so many rising men want to qualify themselves for more serious business. Do you know the Marchioness? No? I'll present you."

The introduction made, Carlyon was going on through the rooms, but Lord Rookbury detained him.

"Stay here a little—never mind the women—a statesman's mind should be above such trifles. Here's Acton Calveley, another young man whose geography will bear improving, *vide* his last book, *passim*. He has a notion that the new men will give him something, whereas they'll do nothing of the kind, for two reasons. Well, Calveley, are we to congratulate you? I heard your name mentioned in a very high place this morning."

"I believe that—a—nothing is *settled*," said Acton Calveley, in a confidential voice and with a very mysterious look, for both of which Lord Rookbury resolved to take instant vengeance.

"I am sincerely sorry to hear you say that, Calveley," said his Lordship in a tone of great interest, "as it implies that you are not to be congratulated. Were it otherwise, you would have known that *all* is settled."

Calveley tried to smile, but it was harder work than a man at his time of life ought to be put to.

"Your information is always so unexceptionable, Lord Rookbury,—and yet I am disposed to think that you are mistaken,—at least premature."

"My dear Acton," said Lord Rookbury, with an air which implied that he was going to put the matter beyond the possibility of doubt, "this gentleman—you should know one another, by the way, Mr. Carlyon, Mr. Calveley—this gentleman is private secretary to Mr. Selwyn. I suppose I need say no more."

"Certainly," said Acton, "that is authority which—but I must speak to Lady Rotherhithe." And he entered her presence, rather abruptly for so very well-mannered a person.

"Eligible young man, that, for an Under-Secretary," said Lord Rookbury, looking after him for a moment. "What could you have to do with it?"

"That is exactly what I should have asked him, if he had waited," said Bernard. "But why did you refer to me?"

"To show you what feather-heads these talented young men are.

You must study such people, as you will be in contact with a good many of them in your time, Mr. Secretary Carlyon."

Bernard did not answer, but he thought that, on the whole, Calveyley was in a more respectable position than the Earl, who had simply acted a lie, and had mystified the younger man. Resolving, if he had an opportunity, to undeceive the latter, so far as his own share in the affair was concerned, Carlyon again entered the saloon, and made his way through the crowd. Presently he met Selwyn, who was coming away.

"Make the best use of your time, Mr. Carlyon," said the ex-minister, smiling.

"Good advice from anybody," said an exceedingly pretty woman, with a dark eye and a slightly resolute lip, who was looking earnestly at Selwyn as he passed; "but from you it sounds like an awful warning. Anything excessively dreadful going to happen?"

Selwyn looked for a moment as if the rich musical voice of the speaker were not particularly welcome to his ear, but the expression on his well-trained features was so evanescent that it escaped Carlyon, if not the lady.

"Who could speak of dreadful things to Mrs. Forester?" he said, with a half smile, and would have passed on, but an advancing group compelled him to pause for an instant, and the painted feathers of Mrs. Forester's fan lay on his arm.

"Why do you avoid me—why do you *eschew* me?" she said, in a low, earnest tone. "You understand the word—it belongs to your own school. You hate me."

"Fancy," said Selwyn, coldly.

"No," she whispered, "you will not take the trouble? I am not worth your hate? That is the thought in your brain at this moment. I can read it."

"You are a first-rate actress in charades, they tell me, Mrs. Forester," said Selwyn, still with a cold, but very courteous manner, "but we all make mistakes at times. See, there is Albani going to the instrument—how delighted we are going to be!"

"No affected pleasure, Mr. Selwyn. You are known to care nothing for music. But anything to evade an answer. Sit here and listen to Albani, and I will promise not to interrupt your newly-discovered sensations."

The ex-minister's glance was not one of gratification at being thus ordered to take his place beside one of the most charming women in London, but he could hardly disobey the command, and as he sat down he met the keen eye of Lord Rookbury, who was watching the scene with evident amusement. As soon as the Earl saw that Selwyn had observed him, he made a little mocking bow, so slight as to be unnoticed, except by his theological friend, and then walked away, and planting himself before the picture of "Joseph and Potiphar's Wife," which hangs between the windows, affected to study the story.

The finest contralto voice in the world then silenced everybody, until the artiste, with a frank, hearty smile, put out one plump arm for the gloves which a Duke handed to her, and the other for the bouquet, over which a Field-Marshal had kept vigilant guard. Amid the well-bred raptures which followed, Mrs. Forester said,—

"I humbly hope she has repaid you for the vexation of having to sit by me for five minutes."

"What strange things you say!" replied Selwyn.

"And who drives me both to do and to say strange things?" returned the lady, reproachfully.

"The Devil, I believe," said Selwyn to himself, but he framed the reply somewhat more courteously for the lady. "Is that another charade?" he asked, laughing. "I give it up."

"You will exasperate me into frenzy one of these days, with your mocking coldness, and your resolution not to understand and appreciate me, Francis Selwyn," said the lady, bitterly: "and then upon your conscience will lie any folly I may commit. I do not believe you even read my letters. Do you, now? On your honour as a gentleman?"

"I read all letters," said Selwyn, with affected solemnity, "and my secretary there, Mr. Carlyon, folds, indorses, and files them. He is a most accurate person, I assure you. Mr. Carlyon, I have the pleasure of introducing you to Mrs. Forester. Mr. Carlyon's taste for music is highly cultivated, and he will be able to tell you whether Alboni's last embroideries were legitimate or not." And Selwyn managed to retreat while speaking. The look which followed him was not *an amiable one*, nor was it lost upon a couple of perfectly

dressed young men who stood near. One of them was handsome, and wore dark moustaches, which descended at so acute an angle that their point up at his nose seemed to connect the arrangement with the invention for keeping a horse from throwing down his head. The other was very fair, snub-nosed, rosy, and whiskerless, with straight hair and a huge cherub's-wings cravat.

"I say, Alfred," said the moustached one, "how that Mrs. Forester bores Selwyn. The poor fellow has no peace of his life."

"Serves him right," replied the gentleman addressed as Alfred, glancing down at his magnificent studs. "Why don't he tell her to *not*. I should like to catch her or any other woman boring me, if I didn't choose to give her encouragement."

"Hang it, Manvers," said the other, who, having more elements of success about him, spoke, as is usual, in a better tone than the mere pretender, "what's he to do? If she likes him, there's no law to prevent her telling him so. I only wish it was my case instead of his."

"I suppose it would be yours or mine either, if we took the trouble," replied Mr. Alfred Manvers.

The handsome man brought his chin over the edge of his neck-collar, in order to look loftily at the speaker, as this assumption of equality by no means pleased him.

"Dare say," he said, "but I don't think you know her."

"But I do," replied Manvers; "I was introduced to her at Chiswick by the Wintertons. I got up her carriage."

"Well, I want to hear her speak again. Go and talk to her, that's a good fellow. Her voice reminds me of somebody's, I can't tell whose. I'll keep near you."

Mr. Manvers did not appear over-eager to accept the mission, but he could hardly refuse it after what he had said, so he lounged up to the couch on which Mrs. Forester sat, talking to Bernard.

"How de doo, Mrs. Forester? Quite a crowd. Alboni really quite unbearable to-night—can't think what's possessed her to sing that thing. She always spoils it."

Mrs. Forester could see rather better than most persons in the room, but that was no reason why she should not carry a

weapon of defence against Alfreds, and so, having put up her glass and looked at the speaker very conscientiously for some time, she said,—

“I dare say it was very bad, but I don’t remember you.”

“I had the pleasure of meeting you at Chiswick the other day,” said Mr. Manvers, who was growing hot, the rather as his friend was edging as close as was convenient. “I was with Mrs. Winterton.”

“O!” said Mrs. Forester, as she would have received a servant’s apology for a mistake, and immediately resuming her conversation with Carlyon. “Then you think the statue idealized out of all womanhood—well—yes—but then—”

“That will do, Al,” said his friend, passing him. “You needn’t wait. I remember the voice now—it’s Rachel’s, where she speaks so contemptuously to what’s his name—you know the play.”

And as Mrs. Forester did not betray the slightest intention of looking round again, Mr. Manvers, after a pause, thought he had better not wait, and departed with malice in his little heart, and determined to hint scandal against her in all places. She had better have spoken to the fool, whom she remembered perfectly (Lucy Forester only forgot one thing in all her life), and thanked him for getting up her carriage, and then he would have been harmless. To be sure he could not do much harm, but one never knows, and besides when one comes to think of it, it is not Christian-like to annoy people.

Mr. Manvers, disconcerted, made his way into one of the smaller rooms, and found that some kind of scene was in progress. There was quite a crowd of girls and men encircling somebody, who seemed busily making arrangements for a display of ingenuity. Being a tallish person, Mr. Manvers soon penetrated to the heart of the mystery. One of Lady Rotherhithe’s foreign visitors was preparing to “distinguish himself,” a process which all except the best class of foreigners deem necessary in society. The actor in question was a fat man, with rather short legs, over which his trousers were severely tightened. He showed an ample expanse of white waistcoat, and his hair was cropped so short, and so fastened back with cunning appliances, that his large elephant ears were brought *into almost undesirable prominence*. With eyes very wide

apart, with a huge and terrible nose, and with a black hedge of coarse moustache bristling round his mouth, he might perhaps have been called hideous by those whose standard of beauty is conventional, a class now being heavily discouraged by the P. R. B. and others. He was addressing his very select audience, in perfectly good English, but illustrating it with continental energy.

"I must tell you," he said, "my dear friends, that as regards music, I am, myself, wild, mad, frantic, insane, distracted, in short, lunatic. But what I am going to tell you about, a wretch who blasphemed music in the person of one of its noblest professors is as true as the stars. You all know me, all Europe knows me, all the world knows the name of Maximilien St. Croix d'Or; therefore, I would not lie to you. Attend."

With this modest logic, M. Maximilien took a chair in the centre of the admiring circle.

"You all know," he said, "that grand and glorified opera of the heavenly Carl Maria Von Weber, I mean, of course, *Der Freischutz*. I need not speak about it. You know every scene. Attend. When that opera was first given to the world, I was a student of medicine in the town of Sarlsburg. I sang, smoked, danced, drank, loved—what is a student's life? My best friend, Alexis Lamidoff, a young Russian, shared my song, my tobacco bag, my partners, my wine—everything," added the fat man, "but one—the heart of my Lavinia."

A little laughter here hinted to the narrator, that sentiment was ineffective in an English saloon. He remembered how in Germany full-sized men will grunt their sympathy at a love-tale, but he went on.

"*Der Freischutz* was produced at our theatre. The students attended *en masse*. Alexis and myself sat side by side. The opera was triumphant—it was a glory—it was a madness. Yet there were some who resisted its inspiration. Among them, I grieve to tell you, was my own dearest friend, my Alexis. He saw no beauty in those wild and demoniac wailings, and he turned the sweet love-strains to ridicule. I bore it long, for the first notes had done their work on me, and I could have gone proudly to death for the man who thought out that god-like overture. Scene by scene, the hearts of Alexis and myself became more and more estranged. I remonstrated, I implored,

I entreated, I wept, but he was first cold, then angry, then insulting. Finally, when the terrific scene opened, and Caspar, surrounded by the skulls, and with the fire-eyed owl beside him, dragged Adolph into the diabolical circle, and pronounced the incantation, amid thunder, and the shrieks of the owl, and the howls of the demons, Alexis burst into a scornful laughter, and hissed. Yes, he, Alexis Lamidoff, dared to HISS Von Weber. I can tell you little more—my love was hate—I struck him, and in a fierce battle we rolled under the seats, and were both kicked out of the theatre. We mutually swore a deadly revenge, and parted for ever.”

“Deuced amusing—glad it’s over,” drawled a haughty-looking guardsman to the pretty girl on his arm. “Will you have an ice?”

“But I do not think it is all over,” said the young lady. “I must hear it all. It’s delightful.”

“Too violent for my taste, but as you please,” replied the guardsman, with the air of a martyr.

“But times changed,” said M. Maximilien, wiping his forehead with a pocket-handkerchief, and looking at it, to see whether the dye came off his hair; “and I had for some years left the medical profession, and had become the manager of the opera in the city of Schlossaltenburg. The revolution broke out. I did my best to keep my opera going, for music has no party. When the aristocrats triumphed, I wrote a song in their glory, which my *prima donna* sang in an ecstasy for loyalty, wrapping the Duke’s banner around her. And when they were murdered, I wrote another song in glory of the revolutionists, which my *prima donna* sang in an ecstasy for liberty, wrapping the tricolor around her. All went well. Among my operas I revived *Der Freischutz*, with great splendour, and though my actors were fighting in the barricades in the morning, and could not attend rehearsals, still our *ensemble* was superb. But one afternoon, after much fighting in the streets, I was called to the hospital to see one of my performers, who had been wounded. As I consoled him, my eye fell on the face of a badly hurt patient on another bed. He wore a uniform, crimson with blood, dark with stains. It was Alexis, who had entered the military service, and who had come to Schlossaltenburg to fall upon our barricades. Our eyes met savagely. Each remembered the oath of deadly vengeance. That night he died.”

M. Maximilien sprang from his chair, and clearing his way right and left amid the circle, seized a footstool, a vase of flowers from a side table, a candelabrum from a bracket, and snatching several hats from their astounded owners, proceeded to range the various objects in a circle on the floor. Casting his eyes around, he perceived one of those quaint little owl-ink-stands which stare an author out of countenance, and this he placed on the chair by his side. Then tearing a poker from the hearth, he sprang into the ring he had made.

"I am Caspar. Round me are the skulls from which the fiend-light is to gleam out. Here is the devil-owl. But where is Adolph? Ha!" he exclaimed, seizing in his strong and brawny hand the startled Mr. Alfred Manvers, he dragged that dandified young gentleman over the hats, and into the ring, and, despite his uncomfortable protests, held him, as in a vice, amid the laughter of the spectators.

"Do not laugh," he thundered, "but attend. I have told you that Alexis died. The guardians of the hospital were my friends. It is enough. Three nights later, *Der Freischutz* was performed—the theatre was crowded, shouting, maddened. I was the Caspar. The incantation scene came on, and Caspar stood, as now, in the ring, and by his side the shuddering Adolph. The dreadful music was played, the skulls flamed out, the owl shrieked, the demons yelled, and Caspar, as now, fell upon his knees, holding a human skull on the point of his sword, as a sacrifice to the fiends. 'Ha! ha!' he shouted, holding up another hat on the end of his poker, that skull *was the skull of my friend Alexis*. 'My friend,' I exclaimed, 'you have hissed the music of *Der Freischutz*. Now you assist at its performance—have I kept my oath?'"

The group broke up, some of the girls being the least in the world fluttered by the story, and the grim intensity with which M. St. Croix d'Or had told the last portion.*

* Since the original publication of this chapter, I have been informed that M. Maximilien St. Croix d'Or must have learned the story which he recited as a personal experience. It has appeared, I am told, in some French *feuilleton*, as part of the auto-biography of some other gentleman of the same class. I am very sorry. The substance of the tale was narrated to me in one of the gorges of the Danube, in 1850, as an incident of the Hungarian revolution. I did not much believe it at the time, and I am not sure that I believe it much more at present, *malgré* the above-mentioned authentication.—S. B.

"Of course you believe it," said Lord Rookbury, to Mrs. Forester, who, on Bernard's arm, had been listening to the catastrophe.

"I believe everything," said beautiful Lucy Forester, "it saves one such a world of bore from intelligent people who are anxious to explain things you doubt about."

"Quite right," said Lord Rookbury. "Well, Calvey, any fresh news? I told you how things were going, but you did not look as if you believed me, though you saw I was speaking to Mr. Selwyn's confidential secretary."

"Who, however," said Carlyon, "begs to disclaim having furnished Lord Rookbury with any information, or having had any to furnish him with."

"That's the way these young diplomatists talk," said the Earl, coolly. "They have no conscience. The statement comes well from him, as, now that Selwyn is gone, he and I are the only persons in the room who know that there is to be no new ministry."

Action Calvey looked astonished. Mrs. Forester looked astonished. Bernard Carlyon was going to look astonished, when he remembered the peculiar talents of Lord Rookbury. The Marquis of Rotherhithe came up.

"I want to speak to you, Rookbury. Selwyn has told Maria that they are all back again. Can she have mistaken him?"

"No, *she* never mistakes Mr. Selwyn," said the Earl, looking straight at Mrs. Forester as he spoke. "But then the Marchioness is a person of tact."

The answer might have been in Arabic or Chinese for aught that it conveyed to any of the hearers except the lady, who struggled hard against a flush, and kept it down.

"How you all stare!" said the Earl. "Mr. Selwyn's own secretary, too, pretending that he did not know this afternoon that the Queen, on the Duke's advice, has ordered all the Ministers back to their places until further notice. Yes, Mrs. Forester, Mr. Selwyn and all, with a thousand apologies for anticipating your inquiry. It is time of peace again, now, my dear Marquis, and your Temple of Janus may close as soon as you like. The crisis is over, and the country rather better than *could be expected*."

CHAPTER XXI.

CHIEFLY INTENDED FOR LAWYERS.

“**B**UT whether you intend to follow your profession or not,” said Mr. Molesworth to Bernard, shortly after the return of the latter from Aspen Court, “you should qualify yourself for it by passing your examination. It will do you no harm, in after life, to have acquitted yourself well, and besides, it looks vague and scrambling to have given your notices for the purpose, and to have served out your time, as you have done, and then to turn away from the Hall. A man should complete what he undertakes.”

The arguments were unexceptionable, and Bernard Carlyon prepared for the examination which solicitors have been of late years required to undergo, before receiving the certificate that they are competent to be trusted with the interests of their fellow-subjects. The legal Great-Go is not a very formidable affair, however, and the young gentleman who fails in it must have given beer and cigars an unfair preference over Blackstone and Chitty. In the old times, the judge who admitted the solicitor to practice was supposed to investigate his legal acquirements; but, for many years before the regular examination was ordained, the judges imagined that they had almost enough to do without performing this educational operation, and the thing became a form. Some stock anecdotes on the subject are still preserved for the benefit of the novice—they are, however, the Joe Millers of Chancery Lane, and nobody repeats them except in lay company. One of them records that the great lawyer, Lord Ellenborough, observing a country youth of an ingenuous appearance come up to be admitted as a solicitor, burst upon him with the following inquiries—

“Well, Sir, you have learned the law?”

“Yes, Sir; yes, my Lord, I mean, at least I hope so,” was the very proper reply of the candidate.

“Very well. Now, suppose a tenant for life should hold over, what’s the remedy against him?”

“Well, my Lord, that is a case in which—let me see—yes,

with deference to your Lordship, I presume that the course would be regular—I should proceed by ejectment.”

And the hope of the village looked for approbation.

“Ha! And you’d serve the notice by nailing it on the outside of his coffin, I suppose?”

The story is variously finished, according to the taste of the narrator. It may be added that the aspirant for a licence, on comprehending that he had been “sold,” fell down in a fit, or jumped out of window, or took the coach back to Suffolk and cultivated turnips for the rest of his natural life, or assented to the judge’s view, adding an inquiry whether he would like anything to drink, in all of which ways facetious men have concluded it in our hearing. But to the uneducated multitude it may be as well for you to explain that Lord Ellenborough’s “sell” amounted to this. “Holding over” means keeping possession of property longer than you are entitled to do, as a man would who had a lease for seven years and stayed for eight. But a “tenant for life” can hardly adopt this unlawful course, and the zeal of the apprentice of the law, who was instantly anxious, at the very sound of an apparent wrong, to be down upon the wrong-doer, was, therefore, a little hasty. But on the whole, it is better not to tell this or any other story that requires explanation.

The Hall of the Law Society, in Chancery Lane, has various merits, and one of them is the remarkable talent with which the architect has jammed it into the narrow slit which alone could be spared to it in that costly territory. The interior of the Hall is handsome, and many bills of costs must have been duly paid before the funds for raising the structure could have been accumulated. The portrait of one of the oldest and most honoured members of the profession is the only offering by the fine arts to their sulky sister, described by Lord Coke as “the Lady Law, who loveth to lie alone.” There are lectures delivered, at night, to the rising generation of legalists; and under the same roof, moreover, is a very good club, whose wines are choice, and have been shed in honour of many verdicts gained—and lost. It was into this Hall that Mr. Bernard Carlyon and about a hundred other gentlemen, who had paid their country one hundred and twenty guineas, were inducted *one morning*, in order to its being seen how far they were

qualified for getting back that liberal outlay, and perhaps the odd thousand or thirteen hundred pounds which their fees and five years' probation had cost most of them. Far be it from a writer, who hath to do with social life, and whose business it is to lend his aid, small or great as it chanceth, towards the cleansing away and sweeping forth of our social cobwebs, to seek for sophistical reasons why the wholesome broom should not rattle and ferret about Chancery Lane. But there may be no objection to the disabusing the popular mind of a current impression that a solicitor's education is a cheap thing; and, indeed, I do not know that this is not an artful way of further prejudicing the public against the profession, seeing that it will naturally and liberally be supposed that the more a lawyer has spent, the more eager he will be to get his money back.

It was a gloomy, chilly morning, and as the assemblage of solicitors in expectancy waited the opening of the doors, the general aspect of the crowd was not lively. The young lawyer, however, becomes a grave man of business long before the collegian or the medical student has finished what I am told is called larking. There is such an utter absence of everything but prosaic commonplace in the lawyer's avocation (with the exception of that very small proportion of his engagements which connects itself with the public trials), and such an absolute necessity for that commonplace to be regularly and strictly followed out, that a few months of such pursuit tones down the young professional man into order and gravity. He has no animating struggle, no collegiate honours to prompt and to reward his nights of toil and labour; he sees none of the strange and varying physical phenomena which render the medical career one of incessantly shifting excitement. And without any vulgar disparagement of an intellectual calling rendered ignoble by exceptional followers, it is impossible to deny, that while the collegian's studies are chiefly of an elevating character, and while the wildest young fellow who ever ran the hospital must feel that in every bandage he secures, every muscle he learns, he is personally doing something for the good of humanity, the young lawyer must take an unusually extended view of his business, if he sees in it much more than a complicated machine for helping mankind to indulge, according to rule, its healthy and enduring love of antagonism. His own

share in the working of the engine into one end of which we cram a furious, bewildered, and prejudiced brace of enemies, while from the other we draw a pellucid stream of equity, is usually so indirect as scarcely to be appreciable. The absence of any direct and visible purpose in nine-tenths of a young lawyer's work may have something to do with his premature abandonment of enthusiasm about it. The groups which clustered in the portico of the Law Hall on the morning in question presented a marked contrast to similar gatherings at Guy's and at the University.

Most of the men looked as if they had been reading hard, and these were calm and confident enough. But there were a few who had scorned any preparatory training, and had been very vauntful until within a few days of the appointed date, when they suddenly grew frightened and laid out for themselves a system of reading which no one but the man who got through Euclid at breakfast (omitting the childish A B C and D and the foolish pictures) could ever accomplish in the time. Consequently they came up, ill with their gigantic efforts, and flustered at their inefficacy. It was a little piteous to hear a few of the questions these men put to better informed friends, and the helpless want of mental digestion displayed by the inquirers. Among them there was a fast young gentleman named Bliber (somewhat of our friend Mr. Chequerbent's school), who was especially conscious of having neglected his studies. He, in his despair, had devised a small theory of mnemonics, which he trusted would help him to recollect some of the more salient points in the law creed. He had been living rather too hard in more senses than one. Coming up to Bernard, whom he knew, he said, in a low voice,

"I say—do me a favour. Ask me a question or two, such as you think the fellows inside will put."

Carlyon laughed, and, knowing his man, asked him a very simple Chancery question indeed—one equivalent to asking a young lady over her first music-book, how many semitones there are in an octave.

"Stop," he answered, "don't hurry me. I'll tell you. William, that means a bill; resurrectionist, that's revivor; don't hurry me—last part of the *Times*, that's supplement."

"Just so, a bill of revivor and supplement," said Bernard. "I

think I like your system, but you have only answered half the question."

"I know that ; I'm going on," and he struggled to recal his imagery. "Confound it, if they would examine me in my own chambers I should be perfect, because I know to what corners to look for my signs, but here I am lost. Revivor and supplement, well, so far so good. Then there's a nobleman's eldest son William, that's a second title to the bill ; and then a chap beating clothes, that's abating the suit ; and then, a theatrical bespeak, that's praying a specific performance. No, I don't seem to have got what you ask. Try another."

"Yes—what's that dirty fellow eyeing you in that curious way for ? He looks like one of Tango's men. Are you afraid of anything ? Shall I speak to him ? It won't do to be caught to-day, you know."

"Would you be so good ?" returned the fast man, looking round in some trepidation.

Bernard had seen this sort of thing, and the watcher and he came quickly to an understanding, promoted by Carlyon's fingers coming into contact with the other's dirty paw for a moment.

"I can't say after to-day," said the man, mysteriously. !

"After to-day, I dare say he don't care," said Bernard, "and he's always to be found, you know."

"No go," said a keen-faced, dark-eyed, not ill-looking person, evidently of the Hebraic faith, gliding from behind a column—"I must have him, Mr. Carlyon. The clerk to the firm that sues is actually standing there, going up to be examined. He sent over for me. There's no help, unless he had the sense to bolt, and now it's too late."

"Deuced hard upon a fellow on the day on which his chances all depend. I'll speak to the other man."

"No go, I tell you. He's now pointing at Bliber with his thumb, behind his back. What an ass Bliber was not to cut. Ah, he's going to try it now, but it's of no use. Exactly so, the other man is pretending to be friendly and really stopping him—see. Between you and me and this stone post, it don't matter, for Bliber's no more chance of passing than that cab—which *is* passing, you'll say. Not bad. My boy, Solomon, who's eleven, has picked up more law. Mr. Bliber, Sir."

The capture was made, and Mr. Bliber was in the custody of the sheriff. He looked rather depressed, poor fellow, as he departed across the street with the officer.

"I'll come over to you as soon as this is done," said Bernard; "keep up your spirits. And," he said, rather loudly, addressing those about him, "if any other person has apprehensions, I advise him to be off at once, as there is a gentleman here," and he looked at the informant, "whose good feeling at such a time teaches him to point out his fellow-candidates to the bailiffs."

The individual in question, an undersized, wiry, rather unclean looking person, angrily desired Mr. Carlyon to mind his own business.

"I should recommend anybody to mind his own business, rather than entrust it to such dirty hands as yours," replied Bernard; a retort which, being impertinent rather than witty, told with great effect upon the bystanders. One of them, a stalwart young Scotchman, brought a long, lean, but heavy arm upon the hat of the small man, and inextricably bonneted him with the blow. The doors at that moment opened, and the blinded man, struggling in his hat, was hustled by the indignant crowd, and thrust with many kicks into the rear of the group. And as several of the men, as they went in, gravely assured the doorkeepers that the fellow was a well-known pickpocket, the entry which he was ultimately permitted to make into the Hall was not altogether triumphant.

For the awful ceremony of the examination, rows of tables, covered with green baize and furnished with writing materials, ran up the Hall, and at the end a transverse table was placed for the examiners, who were leading members of the profession, and gentlemen in whom it was impossible not to place the fullest confidence. The candidates took their seats, and there was a pause for some minutes, during which recognitions were made and quiet jokes exchanged.

"Which department are you strongest in, Tom?" asked a candidate of his neighbour.

"I don't know; but I'm weakest in criminal law."

"What, after appearing so often before the beaks to be fined?"

"*Oh, you be hanged!*" replied the other, closing the dialogue

with a retort that resembles the barber's chair mentioned by one of Shakspeare's clowns, which fits everybody.

"I have been reading in a conveyancer's chambers," said a third expectant. "None of your pettifogging work for me. I shall treat them with such essays on shifting clauses, and discontinuance, and all that sort of thing, that they will take the rest for granted."

"On the contrary, you write such a hand that they'll pluck you out of mere spite, for giving them so much trouble."

The printed papers of questions were now handed round, and it was with a sort of flutter that the majority of the candidates eagerly skimmed the list to see what was their general chance of making satisfactory replies. There were about eighty questions, and these were divided into six or seven classes, each set being propounded in reference to some separate department of law. Bernard speedily saw that in four of the classes he was perfectly easy, and that he could give a sufficiency of reasonably exact replies to the remaining queries. The distinction will be understood when it is mentioned that in the more aristocratic offices conveyancing and chancery practice are chiefly attended to, while in others common law is the sheet anchor. Criminal law is almost exclusively confined to certain establishments, and few of the generality of young lawyers know more about it than they learn from the police reports.

In the first half hour there was a dead silence, every man studying his paper. The seats are placed at such a distance that communication between the candidates is not easy, and there is, besides, a sort of gentlemanly patrol constantly walking up and down to see that men do not help one another. But they manage to do a little in that way, and small rolls of paper might be seen gliding along the green baize, like miniature billiard-balls, in several directions, sometimes in any line but that desired by the propeller. They were not always, however, petitions for advice, some of them containing miscellaneous criticism. One rolled so near the patrol that, though not willing to see more than he was compelled to do, he could not refrain from taking it up, and though no steps resulted, it was subsequently known to have been read at the examiners' board. It contained a very irreverent and indecorous illustration of the whole proceeding.

"The old Fagins at the end of the Hall respectfully request that their pupils, the young prigs, will look alive. Therefore, fumes, go a-head."

An hour passed, and a few of the more rapid candidates completed their work, and successively carried up their replies to the examination table. They were desired to leave them, and not to retain copies of their answers.

"What's that injunction for, do you suppose?" asked one man of another, as they went out.

"That we may not be able to prove them in the wrong if they pluck us for incompetency."


"I conclude that one of the examiners is going to publish a law book, and wished to avail himself of my incomparable notes on the subject. I hope he means to write on criminal law, as I flatter myself I have rather done the thing. I know nothing about it, but I have answered all the questions."

"Deuce you have? I left them blank. Before whom have you said that offences committed on the High Seas are to be tried?"

"Before the Lord Mayor, of course."

"Nonsense. Why?"

"Because he is Conservator of the River Thames. That's near enough for a gentleman who never dirtied his hands with criminal law."

Carlyon was not among the first group who went up, nor was he latest. Long after he had left, a large body of the candidates sat, and some of them lingered until late in the day. Considering that no young lawyer receives the slightest training or direction from his employers as to his course of study beyond possibly a recommendation to buy one or two of the standard books, and as there is no recognised system round which his reading can be concentrated, it is creditable to the shrewdness and industry of the rising legal generation that they manage to collect so large a quantity of information and to pass their examinations creditably. It would be unjust, under the circumstances, to make the trial very severe, but even conducted as it is, with every desire to help rather than to hinder the candidates, a few fall victims to their own idleness and to the want of the ordinary assistance afforded to every other class to whom such  are proposed. A few lectures, to which the guardian of our

interests (and who, according to the greatest living lawyer, must now be always at our elbow to scare away the Succession-duty vultures) may subscribe or not as he pleases, are all the assistance afforded to help him in self-qualification.

It was contrived that the story of the bailiff and the man who had pointed out the victim should reach the examiners' table, and possibly when the paper was brought up the tone of the receiver was more *brusque* than it had been in other cases. But the unclean little individual knew his work, and had done it fairly; and however glad the authorities might have been to pluck a man by no means likely to adorn the profession, they would not commit the injustice of straining the slightest point against him. I am pleased that he was kicked, but I should have been sorry had he been plucked, for, unclean and discourteous as he was, and mean as appeared the act he had committed (I fear he had no option), he executed the express orders given him by the firm which he was serving. A gentleman would have refused compliance, but this person was not one, but had his articles given him, as the phrase is, in exchange for exceeding hard service, and on a miserable stipend he was just keeping alive a long, white, sickly wife and seven or eight little children, as wiry and as unclean as himself. How he had scraped together his stamp money is only known to himself and perhaps to some disreputable clients in the Borough for whom he collected rents and did all sorts of work at over hours. He was a poor struggling, ill-conditioned creature, but I do not know that he ought to have been ruined. Such men, however, wriggle into the profession of the law, and those who are unfortunate enough to come in contact with one of them never quite forget it, even in the acquaintance of a hundred high-bred and honourable fellows, nominally of the same calling. But this is another sense in which the law—and *not* the London Tavern—is open to "everybody."

CHAPTER XXII.

MR. CARLYON'S CORRESPONDENTS.

No. 1.—THE MISSES WILMSLOW.

Aspen Court, Wednesday,
and several other days.

DEAR MR. CARLYON.



WE have devised a much better plan than yours. Instead of our writing separate notes to you, and boring you with the same things three times over, which we should very likely do, we intend all three to join in the same letter, and so each can relieve the other. This we consider a most clever invention, and whatever merit it has belongs to Kate. [A *great* story. Amy thought of it first. A.] First, you will, of course, be naturally anxious to know how the squirrel is. Well, it is dead. We think that the poor thing's loss is entirely the result of Amy's allowing it to nibble a cake of vermilion out of her colour-box. [We don't think *anything of the kind*, Bernard ; it was frightened to death, by a strange cat. A.] However, perhaps it is for the best, for it used to eat holes in the new curtains, and though mamma is sorry it is dead, we think she used to set the window open to let it run away, which was very artful of her. We tell her we should like her very much if she were not so artful. [She's a *dear*. A.]

We suppose that you go every night to the Opera, and therefore we expect that you will send us some new music, of the best kind, but it had better not be too difficult. You will easily guess whose laziness dictated this last sentence. [Not *mine*. A.] Kate and Emma can now manage *Giorno d'orrore* tolerably well in their own estimation, but their parents do not listen to it with much enthusiasm, mamma saying that we "want practice," and papa telling us, in rather strong terms, that we want *diable!* Kate thinks that if she could hear it once given by the first-rate people she should know, at all events, where our weakness is. As for Amy, she scarcely ever touches the instrument except to ridicule us. [Do not believe them. She practised yesterday. A.] Yes, while we were putting on our bonnets.

Martha brought us in four hedgehogs yesterday, out they are

stupid little things, and we are going to send them away, because papa sets Blue at them, and the foolish dog gets his nose all scratched to pieces. There is a superstition about them, it seems, that they keep off evil eyes. We told this to Lord Rookbury, who has been over here several times, and he laughed heartily, and said something in French which we could none of us catch. Perhaps it was a proverb, and you know it? Lord Rookbury seems to have taken a great liking for papa, and walks about the grounds with him for an hour together. They seem to have known a good many people in common, whom they call by the oddest names. [Mamma don't like the Earl. A.] Amy has no right to say this, Mr. Carlyon. Mamma has never said anything of the kind, and we have scolded Amy for putting it in, but she insists on having her way. [They know it as well as I do. A.] Pray take no notice of such nonsense.

You must write very soon, and tell us how you are going on and how you like your new engagements. Amy says that if there are any young ladies in the family you are not to offer to improve their writing, as hers does you no credit. It is right to say that she has not written a copy since you left. She has now run up-stairs, we believe to scramble over one, in order to contradict this.

Dear Mr. Carlyon, one word in perfect confidence, and do not allude to it when you write back. We are not quite happy about the friendship between papa and a certain person. There seems no reason for it, and mamma, we are certain, listens earnestly to what they say when she meets them; but before they come up to her Lord R. changes his voice, and papa looks very mysterious. If it is wrong to ask you whether you understand it at all, we are very sorry that we have mentioned it. Kate wishes it known that she advised this to be written. We hope that there are no more troubles in store for mamma. Pray excuse the liberty of asking you whether it means anything. *What can Lord R. want with papa?*

Amy insists on finishing the letter. I assure you, Bernard, I have practised a great deal, and have written a beautiful copy. You might send me something from town to amuse me, but I suppose you are so taken up with your fine ladies and your members of Parliament, and your operas, that you never think of me. Never mind, "I am but as one cast away," but I think

you might send the drawing-book, and the pattern for the slippers.

We enclose you our united kind regards, and are,

Dear Mr. Carlyon,

Yours very sincerely,

EMMA }
KATE } WILMSLOW.
AMY }

Bernard Carlyon, Esq.

[P.S. *Answer to Kate—A.*]

No. 2.—MR. PAUL CHEQUERBENT.

Southend, Essex.

MY DEAR CARLYON,

Once more I want you to get me out of a scrape, and positively for the third and last time of asking. I was going to write that I would do the same for you, but you never get into scrapes, at least not to my knowledge ; so I can only say, that if ever you do, command Paul Chequerbent.

"*Amo, amas*, I love a lass." If that does not tell you the whole story, I cannot help it. But the fact is this. I ought to have gone down to you at Thingamy Court. Well, I did not. I went to a ball, and then to the station-house, and then to dinner (a precious bad one), and then to Gravesend, and then I nearly went to the bottom of the Thames, and but for a splendid display of nautical skill on my part, whitebait would be lunching on me at this present writing.

I am here—here means a horribly retired watering-place on the Thames, and I am at the principal inn, with two virtuous females in distress living with me. One of them weighs about nineteen stone. We are in pawn. I have spent all my money and therefore make it up in swagger, for fear the landlord should suspect anything. Just now, as a mere financial operation, I threatened to smash the waiter, a warlike attitude sending up the funds. But this cannot go on.

Will you do two things? See the old Mole, and make it all right for me to come back to the office. Tell him I am innocent or penitent, or have got the measles, or anything you think will *soften his heart*, for he is a stern and oyster man. Next, manage to send me a post-office order for ten pounds, and I will pay you

back in a fortnight at latest, adding the blessings of a shipwrecked mariner. If you knew what a pretty girl was in pawn with me, to say nothing of an exceedingly heavy Christian, nineteen stone as aforesaid, you would hasten to take us out. Till you do, I must go on ordering champagne and insulting the waiter.

Perpetually yours,

PAUL CHEQUERBENT.

Bernard Carlyon, Esq.

No. 3.—MR. MOLESWORTH.

DEAR BERNARD,

I dined at the Law Club this evening, and of course met some of the dons who had presided at the examination. You may like to know that your answers are perfectly satisfactory, and something more, and regret was expressed that a man who had mastered his work should desert it when likely to be profitable. I forestal the official intimation. Let me see you to-morrow.

Yours truly,

S. MOLESWORTH.

Mr. Carlyon.

No. 4.—LILLIAN TREVELYAN.

FIVE letters from you, dearest Bernard, and only one poor little note from me in answer, and yet *perhaps* that one little note caused me more thought than you bestowed upon all your kind letters. Ah! I hear your reply as clearly as if you were murmuring it at my ear. You would tell me to let my heart speak as you do yours, and then there would be little need for thought. Tell me when you write, Bernard, whether those were not the words that flew to your lips when you read what I have written. And yet you need not, for I am certain they were. Indeed, my heart is speaking to you. Sometimes I think that it can speak better in a letter than when we are together, and then again I know that it is not so. Bernard, you must not read my letters with your eye only, but take them into some quiet place and read them aloud to yourself. Try to put Lilian's accents upon Lilian's words. She will trust you to be her inter-

preter, for she believes that you understand her. I will answer for that on her part.

You have never loved before, dear Bernard (do I write your name too often?—ah, if you could only see—but never mind), but you must have been loved. Perhaps there is some poor woman's heart that loves you now. I rest so perfectly tranquil in my entire faith in you, that I could hear that it was so, and feel only kindness for her and pity. But I have an earnest desire to know whether all women who truly love are possessed by that bewildering sense of emotion, which is now my trouble and my delight. Bernard, since *that* day, all that I see, all that I read, all that I hear, has a new meaning. There is a whirl around me, and yet I am at peace. I feel a thousand times more estranged from the world, and yet there is nothing in which I do not feel an interest. I have heard of the selfishness of love, and I may be unknowingly selfish, but it seems to me that my heart has expanded, and finds something good and joyous, turn where it will. But I have a good mind to strike out all that I have said. If I let it remain it is only on condition that you promise to remember this, that I have been brought up in almost isolation, and if I speak too frankly—no, I do not, but perhaps I am giving but a foolish, impulsive utterance to my sensations. Are you reading this aloud, Bernard? If you are, you will not smile, but I am afraid to look back and see what I have written. How different is the feeling with which I read every line, every word of yours—read it as a whole, and in separate sentences, and comparing one word with another—come, I will let you smile now.

Not a word has passed between Mr. Heywood and me upon the subject. He has never introduced your name, and, as you may be sure, I have not done so. But I am certain that you are not out of his thoughts. I know this from little symptoms which it is but of late that I have thought of remarking. In speaking only yesterday to a visitor, he quoted something that you said, on your first visit, and he used your exact words, and then scoffed at the opinion, but he never alluded to you. And he has discarded a favourite book which used seldom to be out of his hand—the title is “The works of F. Rabelais, Physician.” I am *certain* that you spoke of the book, and he threw it away one *day*, remarking that he supposed that it would be a school-book

one of these days, considering what sort of persons professed to understand it now. I am positive that he alluded to you, and the more so, because he would not look at me while he spoke. Am I not a keen-sighted little spy? But I hope it does not vex you to hear this? Mr. Heywood is a clever person, but dreadfully prejudiced, and bitter when he takes an antipathy.

My dear, dear Bernard! that is what I want to repeat to you until you are tired of hearing it, and so long as you please you may say it to yourself for me. You must pardon anything that you do not altogether like in my letter, and say to yourself "Poor Lilian has been neglected, but we will teach her better." God bless you, my own Bernard.

Your affectionate
LILIAN.

Bernard Carlyon, Esq.

P.S.—Every day? Of course. And if there are two posts, which I think there are, you are to write twice a-day. I wonder whether you wear that chain.

No. 5.—MRS. FORESTER.

Park Street, Friday.

MY DEAR MR. CARLYON,

If you are the good-natured person you professed yourself to be, you will look in here to-morrow night, after the Opera. There will be two or three pleasant girls, so you need not be afraid of a *tête-à-tête* with

THAT MRS. FORESTER.

P.S. Mind, I should not *ask* you, if I did not *want* you.

No. 6.—MR. BLIBER.

Hotel Jerusalem.

MY DEAR CARLYON,

I can't turn in until I have scribbled a few words to thank you for your kindness to-day, and, as they charge threepence for a sheet of paper, a penny for a wafer, and twopence for a Queen's head, here goes for six penn'orth of gratitude. Nonsense apart, old man, I am devilishly thankful to you. As to the mopuses, of course, we'll put that all straight as soon as I can, meantime, I enclose my I O U, which if the Bank of England were carried

on upon the true principles of currency would be discounted impromptu, and, in fact, with thanks to me for encouraging their establishment. I drink your health.

Well, I'm locked up, and, I fancy, likely to be, for between you and me, I've rather overdone the thing. The governor has paid me out twice, but he can't manage it again; his living's a small one; and then I have a set of unnatural brothers and sisters who think they ought to be maintained as well as me, and they may have some faint show of right on their side. They have clubbed their little sixpences for me, often, and I mean to pay them back some day. But, clearly, I shall not let the Rectory party know of the present state of affairs. I shall write that I am sent to Paris on a special mission.

Somebody told me—a fool, I suppose—that you were going to cut the law. The best answer to that was my seeing you at the law shop to-day. If I had your chances and your talent, I would make a fortune. Don't you think of going out? Now, to encourage you, I will give you a job. You shall have the honour of taking me through the Insolvent Court. Such a chance does not often occur to a young beginner. I see in it your first step to a brilliant career, and I drink your health.

I shall be moved over to the Bench at once, as, though mine host here is not a bad fellow in his way, half a guinea a-day for leave to walk in a cage is too much. So I shall cross the water, and as soon as I get a good room, I shall give a bit of a party, and you must come. I know a fellow who will bring a flute, and we'll have cards and kippered salmon, and all the other delicacies of the season. Your health!

There's nobody here, scarcely, except an unfortunate young fellow who says he put his name to a bill to serve a friend, (I am told that a good many people do that,) and never received any of the money, but had believed that the bill was taken up. Do you believe that a bill was ever taken up? He cannot pay, being a clerk with one hundred and forty pounds a-year. Moreover he will assuredly lose his situation if he is not at his desk to-morrow, as his employers are city people, very religious, who say that it is wicked not to pay your debts whether you can or not, and will infallibly give him the sack. Another thing against *him* is that he has been married about three months only, having *exhausted* what little credit he had to furnish a couple of rooms.

Rather a pretty girl, his wife. She has been here, crying her poor little soul out, and wanting to stop with him and comfort him ; a very irregular proposal. So I promised to comfort him, and the poor girl went away convulsed with sobbing, but, on the whole, grateful. She brought him a nice little bundle—shaving things, a night-cap, and some cough lozenges. How the women think of you when you are in a mess. As soon as I have gone through the Court, I shall marry. I wish I had done it sooner. The clerk talked of poisoning himself ; a nasty idea, out of which I have argued him. I appealed to his moral sense, but that shop was shut up. But luckily he has assured his life for some trumpery hundred pounds for poor little Mary—that's his wife—and as soon as I reminded him that the policy would be vitiated, he actually spirted out the brandy and water from his mouth, as if that were poison too ; and he was not far wrong. I suppose there's nothing can be done for the little wretch ; if there could, I should be glad, as his wife's eyes are like my sister Fanny's. Your health !

This is a long rigmarole ; but what's a fellow to do but write when he is locked up in a sponging-house, with nobody but a weeping dot-and-go-wunner to talk to. Come over to-morrow, that is a good old man, and bring some cigars and a sporting paper. Finally, your health !

Ever yours,

SAMUEL BLIBER.

Mr. Carlyon.

P.S.—I hear that M'Farlane nearly smashed that rascal, and that you all kicked him round and round the Hall. What a lark ! When I get out I shall study the art of cookery with express reference to his goose.

No. 7.—THE REV. CYPRIAN HEYWOOD.

Lynfield Magna.

DEAR SIR,

Evasisti, and, either voluntarily or accidentally, you have abstained from giving me an opportunity of hearing you further on the matter of which we spoke. The subsequent interview at which I had the honour of assisting, when you and L. T. appeared to have completed certain personal explanations, in no

degree interferes with the arrangement made between ourselves. The only reason for my referring to that interview is, that I may duly recognise the fact that you did not take the step which was to announce the end of our negotiation. This, therefore, I hold ratified. You are prepared to win the hand of L. T. upon the terms we discussed. The high contracting parties understand one another.

I apprised you that if you should accept our proposals, you would find yourself ably supported. Measures have been already taken to prepare such support for you. You will see the impossibility of my entering by letter into details; but in order to show you that such is the case, let me say that the same influence which has so recently given you an important advancement in the path you have chalked out for yourself, has been at work in the quarter you have recently quitted. I have reason to think that you already understand this statement, but if not, your correspondence in the course of a few days will fully explain and confirm it. If I add that in replying to that quarter you will do well to use a discretion which the character of your correspondents does not seem to call for, I think you will give me credit for not advising you idly. I have only to add, for the moment, that I shall receive with satisfaction any communication from you.

So much for business. And so, young Carlyon, you wish to serve the state, and to that end have gone into harness. I applaud your resolution; any audience is better than the Furred Law Cats. And you have got a strong man for your driver, a perfect Talus of a charioteer, with an iron flail for a whip. Good also—you will learn your paces the faster. I know Selwyn. A steady coachman, with his Protestant lights well trimmed, and small mercy for the wicked who run under his wheels. But all public men are alike. You will have to play hypocrite with him and for him, just as if he were as *insouciant* a Gallio as Melbourne, whom you hardly recollect. Only that when the work is done, and the mask off, beware of expecting Selwyn to laugh with you at the imposition. He will be stern, and grave, and conscientious. He may have brought himself to think, with Voltaire, that *le mensonge n'est un vice que quand il fait du mal*, nay, the worthy Evangelical may even believe that *c'est une grande vertu quand il fait du bien*, but you will not catch him

saying it. Shall I tell you another thing which it would take you some time to find out for yourself? Talus is a man of intensely strong passions, which he governs with great resolution; but, when he does abdicate, the world comes to an end, for the hour. I recommend you to see, rather than to aid in bringing about one of his volcanic explosions, as the stones fly in all directions.

I would tell you some scandal about him, but I hear that you are being initiated into the Eleusinia, and you will hear everything in due course. Does he still refuse one government office in particular—the Woods and Foresters? Do people still say that he derives the name Lucy, *a non dare lucem*? (You see that I have sat at good men's feasts.) The poor, good, virtuous Selwyn!

I know that you are looking forward to Parliament. You will attain your object. What else you will obtain is another story. Parliament has never been worth a sensible man's notice since the good days came to an end. Walpole paid the Scotch members ten guineas a-week during the session; they richly deserve it now for the exemplary way in which they settle business out of the House, and never keep people sitting over Scotch bills. And there have been payments to English members since his days. But that seems all over. You will be bribed by a *circumbendibus*, if you turn out worth bribing. It will run through some very good dining-rooms and some brilliant assemblies, and, possibly—I don't know—may promise to run near some small judicial appointment. By the way, reconsider your fancy, and enter an inn of Court. Like Abel Drugger, you do not know—

“What grace her Grace may do you—in black stuff.”

Rely upon it, the barrister's gown is the wedding garment of the British feast of fat things.

Find time to write to me, if in charity. It is a comfort to have a letter from anybody who contradicts and irritates me. I have broken down the hearts of the folks of Lynfield, and they agree with me in all things in a contemptible manner, for the which I hate them. *Abi, lector.*

C. H.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A SUPPER AFTER THE OPERA.



T may be a question, though one which will certainly not be discussed here, whether a young gentleman so attached as we have endeavoured to represent Mr. Bernard Carlyon, had any particular business at Mrs. Forester's supper. And perhaps that handsome woman's assurance that he would not be compelled to sit *lôte-à-lôte* with her, for that there would be some pleasant girls in the party, will be held, by engaged and other selfish people, to be almost an aggravation of his offence in accepting the invitation. There can be no sort of doubt, that Carlyon, having replied to Lilian's affectionate letter by the evening post, should have concluded his secretary's labours, and, after a quiet repast, should have betaken himself to the solitude of his chambers, meditated on Lilian's beauty and other merits, on his own good fortune in having secured her heart, and on plans for hastening their union. And as it was Saturday, and there would be no early mail next morning, he might have written another very long letter, and perhaps a poem, to be sent in a parcel to Lynfield by one of the Sunday trains. And so, with his waking mind full of Lilian, he should have retired to his couch in order to dream of her. That, or something very like it, is, one knows, what the more trustful girl would desire, and what the more exacting girl would demand, and a really good young man would have rejoiced to carry out so pleasing a programme. But how few good young men there are! Let us hope that the teaching conveyed in this history will increase the number.

Bernard, however, having an opera stall for that night, did not conceive that he should be doing any treason to Lilian by occupying it. Of course, it was as easy to think of her amid the caressing tones of the love music in the *Sennambula*, as in a solitary silent room in Lincoln's Inn Fields. But he had scarcely taken his seat when Mrs. Forester, who had a pit-box near the orchestra, made him out and signalled him. There was nothing to be done but to go round to her. She was looking exceedingly well, her fully, but not too fully developed form appeared to

much advantage in evening dress—is there any harm in putting it in another way, and confessing that her large white shoulders and rounded arms were pleasant to behold? Goethe says that no one who really cultivates his faculties will allow a day to pass in which he does not listen to some fine music, gaze on a good painting, and talk to a beautiful woman—and that is by no means the worst counsel that ever came from Germany. And then, besides herself, Mrs. Forester's box contained a younger lady, *décolletée* like her friend, and with nearly as much excuse, and possessing a face whose attraction lay rather in its intelligence than its regularity of feature. By daylight you might have found a good many faults in that little girl's appearance, but she managed her black curls, her long black eyelashes, and her very good teeth, and her flexible figure, with a sort of piquant restlessness which lured the eye to follow her movements, against the advice of the judgment. She was obviously ready to be saucy and intimate on the slightest provocation; but if you desisted from talking to her, and if you retired and watched her with that calm artistic regard—the only way, I hope, in which you ever notice such matters—the eye and the lip did not tell you, I think, that the poor girl was happy.

"Stay with us," said Mrs. Forester, with one of her most shiny smiles, as Bernard, having acquitted himself of the usual profundities about the badness of the house, and the goodness of the singers, and the ugliness of the people to whom the royal box had been lent that night, and so forth, began to consider whether he should depart. "Don't go away. I listen to music sometimes, but Miss Maynard never does, so you may talk as much as you please."

"How *can* you say so?" replied Miss Maynard, shaking up her curls as she looked into Carlyon's face with a steady gaze, and then shaking them again as she affected to look down for a second. The movements were nothing, but they were high art, for the action left on his eye a picturesque impression of an animated countenance, which his memory daguerreotyped at once and for the future. Curlpapers and a nightcap, if there be such things in the world, would not efface that first glancing, sketchy recollection—"How can you say so, when I have hardly uttered a word since the opera began?"

"Well, now utter a good many. Any political news, Mr.

Carlyon ? Of course you will not tell me, but it is good practice for a rising diplomatist to be questioned by idle people."

"I know of none," said Bernard, "except that it is very doubtful whether Lumley will have this place next year."

"Take that chair. Mr. Selwyn told me last night that you were a learned authority on music. Is that so, and are you a believer in any one particular school, and intolerant of all others? Because nobody will give you credit for understanding Beethoven unless you scoff at Bellini."

"I shall be very happy to scoff with you in any direction you please," said Carlyon ; "but it seems very possible to appreciate both Fidelio and this thing."

"I tell you, no. No man can serve two *maestri*. Music is the next thing to love. Can a man love two women at once? Answer that," said Mrs. Forester, leaning a little forward, and looking up into Bernard's eyes, as if she were earnestly asking for a piece of information.

"Without answering for the expansiveness of other people's affections," replied he, "I am inclined to think that I could not."

"Did you ever try?" jerked in Miss Maynard, with another toss of the black curls.

"The answer is on his tongue," said Mrs. Forester ; "but he thinks that having known you for about five minutes only, you may imagine it premature. He will not hesitate when he is a little better acquainted with you, Mary, to say whatever comes into his head—or heart. He was going to declare that he never felt more temptation to try than at this moment."

"Nobody who liked you could possibly like me," retorted Mary Maynard, with some haste.

"Me, my dear child ! I was not so presumptuous," said Mrs. Forester, carefully keeping out of her tone the contempt that was most assuredly at her heart. "But Mr. Carlyon is an engaged man—at least, so Lord Rookbury says."

"Oh, how capital !" said Miss Maynard, brightening up with a great show of delight. "Now we shall be the best of friends. I like engaged men, because they cannot misinterpret any nonsense one talks. I am so glad you are engaged, Mr. Carlyon. Tell me all about the young lady, won't you?"

Bernard was a little puzzled. If he had met this unhesitating

Mary Maynard in a different atmosphere, he would have had a harder thought for her. In fact, if he had flirted with her on the staircase at some party eastward of the Eden of civilization, he would merely have called her a fast girl, and given her some more champagne. But how she should come to be the *protégée* of Mrs. Forester, who went to Rotherhithe House, and who was confidential with a Minister!—And then, again, why had that old Earl been talking to Mrs. Forester about him? However, one must speak, and not think, with two women in an opera-box; and so Bernard, resolving to comprehend the matter as he might, caught up Miss Maynard's edifying tone, and between them they managed to get through a good deal of exceeding nonsense before the evening was over. Mrs. Forester took but little share in the chatter, but when she did interpose it was to lend it a little increase of earnestness, and, rather adroitly, to interest the speakers in one another. And when Amina was made happy, she said,—

“If you young people do not care about the ballet, we will go home—you are engaged to me, Mr. Carlyon, you know.”

His arm was of course Mrs. Forester's, as they went to the carriage, but as he handed Miss Maynard in, she not only took his hand, but pressed it with evident intention. Nothing but gratitude, of course, for his having amused her so well. But she never spoke once on their way to Park Street.

Mrs. Forester's house was small, but perfect in its way, and proving a taste which somewhat vindicated her in Bernard's eyes from certain suspicions that came across him. The supper-room was delightful. It was sufficiently but softly lighted, and the ample and luxurious chairs and couches indicated that the suppers there were not things to hurry over or run away from. The table was laid for six, but from a note which Bernard did not see given to the lady, but which must have been given her or she could not have had it, she read with a slight expression of regret that two sister Falkners had been prevented from coming.

“Dear girls both,” she said, “and I am very sorry you do not meet them. I asked Lord Rookbury to come in, too, but he sent round word that he must go out of town. So we are sadly reduced, and you must amuse our sadness, Mr. Bernard Carlyon.”

He did his best. We will have no hypocrisy. That young man was beginning to feel somewhat elated with his removal into a pleasanter sphere of life than that in which he had passed previous years. He was scenting the aroma of aristocratic society. He had lately been the guest of an Earl, had been introduced to Rotherhithe House, had been made the secretary to a Minister, and was now admitted to the intimacy of one of the most beautiful women at the West End. The idea, snobbish or not, is written down deliberately. It is certain that he ought to have been more of a philosopher, that he ought to have remembered that all men are equal, and that it can make no difference in a lady's merits whether she resides in Whitehall or Whitechapel. But I never pretended to depict a perfect young man. I repeat, that the social influences had begun to tell upon Bernard Carlyon—that he felt he was exalted to a better level than heretofore, and he was stimulated to seem to deserve the position he was acquiring, and to acclimatize himself therein. And, therefore, when Mrs. Forester desired him to amuse her and the *piquante* Mary Maynard, this young man resolved to do his best to that end. It is possible that the tone of the new world into which he had been taken was not to be caught in an instant, and that the keen and practised eye of Mrs. Forester might remark somewhat too much of effort, and too evident a desire to please; but if so, she kept her criticism to herself, and gave the frankest smile and the silverest laugh to the wit of the young secretary. He played his part well, whipped the trifle called talk with an adroit hand, and finding that the slightest dash of foreign flavour was not unwelcome to the taste of Mrs. Forester, he availed himself of certain Parisian recollections which, if indiscreet, he managed discreetly enough, and which were quietly appreciated by Lucy Forester, and, it must be said, still more evidently relished by Mary Maynard. And the little supper being perfectly served, and Mrs. Forester's wine being so exquisite that Carlyon wondered who could attend to it for her, the party became exceedingly radiant as the Sabbath came in. Mrs. Forester lay back in her delightful chair, and resting her classic head upon a soft little cushion, listened with the most charming smile, and retorted without *taking the trouble* to move her eyes from the lamp, while that *strange* Mary Maynard, under some pretence or other, had

curled herself up in a corner of the couch on which Bernard was, and sat in a sort of Oriental attitude which had many advantages, not the least being that it enabled Carlyon to observe that her foot was exceedingly pretty.

"We have laughed enough," said Mrs. Forester. "Now let us talk some metaphysics."

"That we may laugh the more," said Bernard. "But who knows any? I am afraid mine are forgotten."

"I thought it was an amusement for two, not three," said Mary Maynard. "At least I have noticed that it always ends in whispering, which seems absurd among three people. But I want you," she added to Bernard, "to tell me something about that lady whom Lord Rookbury mentioned—I am very curious to know what sort of a person would enchant you."

Bernard's heart—or was it his conscience?—gave him the least twitch, as he endeavoured to answer with the falsehood which ordinary civility seemed to require.

"Nonsense!" said Miss Maynard, with a little pout. "I expected a better answer from you. I am certain that I resemble her in not one single respect." A truth which Bernard admitted to himself, not exactly with dissatisfaction. "But I will describe her to you," continued the young lady. "Shall I?"

"One would like to know how accurate Lord Rookbury is."

"But my description has nothing to do with Lord Rookbury. I believe that he told Lucy nothing about her. I judge from your own character, which I have been reading all the evening."

"Had I known that, you should have had a more amusing page," replied Bernard. "But will you tell me what you have read?"

"Some of it. You are very proud—therefore you have chosen a lady who will do you honour. So she is beautiful, and graceful, and accomplished. You are very worldly yourself, but you ridicule worldly people; I suppose, therefore, that she is something religious, and pious, and all that. I can hardly tell about her appearance; but she is fair, because Mrs. Forester is so, while I am dark, and you have been looking at her almost all night, and scarcely ever at me. And I think she is tall, for a reason which I shall not tell you."

"All wrong, Mary," said Mrs. Forester, to Bernard's surprise: "I mean, all except the grace and beauty, of course."

"I do not believe it," replied Miss Maynard, almost vehemently. "What is the reason he has hardly looked at me? Don't tell *me*!" And her tone was growing so serious, that Bernard decidedly looked at her this time, and privately wondered whether he could have filled her wine-glass once too often.

"Is her foot prettier than Mary's?" asked Mrs. Forester, laughing.

"O, foot!" said the singular girl, immediately pulling it under her drapery, but almost immediately afterwards reproducing it, with a half-smile.

At this moment a slip of paper was brought in to Mrs. Forester. She rose at once.

"Take care of him, Mary," said she, in a curious tone, as she left the room. As the door closed, Bernard turned to his attractive companion, and found she was gazing wistfully at him, with something like preparations for a cry. What hard creatures men are! His thoughts immediately recurred to the wine-glass.

"I know you think me very strange," said she, after a pause which he had hardly known how to break. And the symptoms of an outbreak became more and more evident. But she struggled with her impulse for a moment.

"Don't make a common-place civil answer," she said, "or I shall have no patience with you. I know your thoughts. You are sitting there despising me as hard as you can. Don't tell *me*!"—a phrase which the young lady seemed to affect. "Presently you will go away, and as you light your cigar in the street you will smile and say, 'Queer girl that—something wrong.' And to-morrow you will sit down and write to Miss, and tell your dearest love that you went out to supper, and met the oddest sort of girl, with her dress off her shoulders, and black hair, not altogether ugly, but cracked, you believe; and then you will make a sketch of me for Miss's amusement, and assure her that she has no cause for jealousy. I know—don't—tell—*me*!" And she almost gasped. Bernard compassionately took her hand (a very soft and warm one), and she looked up quite piteously.

"Say you will not write that in your letter," said Mary, in the *most earnest* and petitioning way.

"I should never have thought of writing anything like it," said Carlyon kindly. "What makes you think so?"

"O, I don't know," said Mary, kneeling upon the couch. "But I am so wretched!"

A single silver sound was just audible, as if a small table-bell had been struck, outside the room.

"If I could tell you everything," said she, still kneeling; "but that is impossible now. I wonder whether I shall ever see you again."

"Certainly, if you wish it," said Bernard, not exactly knowing what else to say.

"O, I do, I do *so* much!" she replied, sobbing. "Will you promise it?—will you pledge yourself to it? There, I am sure you will, and—and—"

It was so evident that she meant to be kissed, by way of confirmation of the promise, that there was really no appeal; and though, of course, Bernard, under existing circumstances, most reluctantly approached her lips, he did touch them. And whether she had bent too far forward in her kneeling position, or however else it might happen, a cloud of black curls fell upon his cheek, and Mary Maynard into his arms. He could hardly look up for a moment or so, but as her curls fell back from his face, he did, and met another gaze.

"Which is the white Hermitage, young Carlyon?" said Mr. Heywood. "Ah! this, I think," he added, quietly filling his glass.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"STONE WALLS DO NOT A PRISON MAKE."



R. CHEQUERBENT'S peace was easily made for him by Bernard, the rather that the old Mole, as Paul very improperly termed his employer, had just received instructions to institute certain Chancery proceedings, of great costliness, on behalf of one of Paul's country relatives. But there were some other people less placable than the head of the firm of Molesworth and Penkridge, and one morning early, Mr. Paul Chequerbent, throwing aside the streaming curtains of his shower-bath,

stepped out to confront a jolly-looking man, who had somehow slidden into the bedroom while Paul was concealed within that temple of health, and who, good-naturedly enough, invited him to dress at his leisure, and to come and breakfast at the house of a common friend. To show that he could take no denial, he opened the door, and admitted another gentleman, of somewhat less pleasing countenance, whom he requested to witness the invitation. Paul felt rather staggered, but he had been expecting the blow for a long time ; and, as the classic authority whence we derive so much consolation in our afflictions sonorously observes : *Meditatio futurorum malorum lenit eorum adventus*. And it might have fallen at a worse time, for he had some sovereigns in his pocket, and Angela had gone off to play a short engagement in the country. So he handed his cigar-case to the minister of law, dressed, and in due course found himself breaking his eggs at the very table whereon his friend, Mr. Bliber, had written Carlyon the letter contained in our last chapter but one. As soon as his arrival at the Hotel Jerusalem had been notified to the proprietors of similar retreats, several of them waited upon him with documents to which his attention would be requisite before he could return to his home. *Bref*, Paul had been taken in execution for a tailor's bill of fifty-five pounds, and detainers to the amount of a couple of hundred more were lodged.

His first impulse, of course, was to pronounce a series of grave invectives against the law of imprisonment for debt, the absurdity of which he demonstrated with great clearness to the grinning Jew boy who attended upon him, and to the unhappy small clerk of whom Bliber wrote, who still lingered in the expensive sponging-house, in the hope, daily growing fainter, that his poor little wife might be able to scrape together money enough for his release. To them Paul laid it down in the most convincing manner that liberty was the birthright of man, and that his fellow-man had no right to take it away, except for crime ; and, also, that incarceration was ridiculous as well as unjust, because it prevented a man exerting himself to pay his creditors. If walls have ears, those of a sponging-house must be dreadfully bored with these two arguments, which are regarded in sheriffs' official circles as part of the form through which an imprisoned debtor is bound to go. But Mr. Chequerbent having relieved his mind by this

protest against the system which made him the guest of Mr. Aarons, speedily became more practical, and, sending for that individual, took him into council. Mr. Aarons gave him tolerably straightforward advice.

"It's no good talking about what you will do, or what you won't do, until you see what you can do, you know. Don't be in a hurry. You can be pleasant enough here for a day or two, while you see how things is to go. Take a bit of paper and write down every shilling you owe in the world, from this here tailor down to last week's washing, and then see whereabouts you are. What time will you dine? There'll be a jynt at three, but you can have what you like."

So Paul made out a statement of his affairs, in a way he had never done before, and was astonished to find what a goodly muster-roll of creditors he could produce, and more astonished than pleased to find how little he had to show for money which would have to be paid one day or other. And he actually calculated his allowance, and the extra sums he had received from his guardian, and having spent all this, and adding his bills to it, he found that he was living very uncomfortably at the rate of about seven hundred a-year. Mentioning this discovery to the small clerk, the latter began to cry, and said that he had been as happy as the day was long on one hundred and forty, with his little wife and two little rooms; but that was all over now; their furniture must be sold, and she must go back to her mother.

"Do you mean to tell me," said Paul earnestly, "that a fellow can keep a wife for one hundred and forty pounds a-year! Why, it has cost me a deuced deal more than that for dinners only, during the last year!"

"A hundred and forty pounds a-year is seven shillings and sevenpence-farthing a day, Sir, as you know, or about two pounds thirteen and sixpence a-week."

"No, I'll be hanged if I know anything of the kind," said Paul, "or how you find it out, but I'll take your word for it. But I suppose two people might manage on it. Let's see. Breakfasts—coffee, ham, and eggs, we'll say. Well, they charge two shillings at a moderate hotel; I suppose it could be done at home for eighteen-pence. By Jove! that's only one, though. Well, a woman don't eat so much as a man—say half-a-crown

for two. Lunch, a shilling. Then dinner. Well, you can dine decently enough at a slap-bang for eighteen-pence, that's three shillings, and I suppose you couldn't do it cheaper at home: making in all—what did I say?—yes, that's six and six. And then supper—by Jove, there's only one and a penny for supper! You must starve your wife, Sir; there's no other way of doing it."

"God bless me, Sir!" said the little clerk, quite alarmed, "you've taken and eaten up all the money. Where's the rent, and the coals, and my clothes, and my wife's, and the money to be put away against her confinement?"

"O, do people put away money for those things?" said Paul, who began to think there were some matters he had not considered in his earlier life.

"And then there's the charwoman that comes to do the rough work, she must be paid, and as for any little excursion on Sunday—"

"That's wicked," said Paul, "and I shall decidedly tax that off your bill."

"If you knew the good it did us both, Sir, when I have been wearing out my eyes over accounts all the week, and my wife has seen nothing but a dirty red brick wall, and I have had the noise of wheels in my ears, and she the clatter and screaming of the court near our house, which, besides, is not drained as it ought to be, or the lodgers would not look quite so white—to get into a Parliamentary train on a Sunday morning, and for a few pence to be placed among quiet green trees in God's fresh air, and so get up strength and spirits for another week's work—but I shall never do it any more," sobbed the poor little man, quite despondingly.

"But I am damned if you shan't!" exclaimed Paul, who was easily moved, and now felt outrageous on considering his companion's hardships. "I shall stick your debt in among mine, it's no great matter when one's about it, and we'll get out together." But the small clerk shook his head, and looked up with a watery and incredulous smile at such an unbusiness-like suggestion.

"By Jove!" continued Mr. Chequerbent, "it *is* a hard matter, and no mistake, when such a little money serves to make two people happy, that they should not have it. There's something *wrong* in this world, and that's all about it. The Coming Man

hasn't come, and he keeps us waiting in a most disgusting manner. Perhaps, I'm the Coming Man myself, and don't know it. Any how, I'll be the Coming Man for you, and mark my words, if I don't. And here's the Coming Woman. I'll go and smoke in the cage, and leave you to yourselves." And bowing respectfully to the rather pretty little meek-eyed wife, who came in at that moment, and dutifully tried to get up a smile for her husband's consolation, though she had clearly no smiling stuff in her thoughts, Paul went out into a yard, around and over which were iron bars, like those of the Zoological Society's bear-cages, and began to establish pantomime relations with such servant-maids as appeared at the windows "giving" upon the den of wild Christians. He varied these amusements by efforts for the conversion of the Jew boy in attendance, asking him the lowest sum for which he would eat a plate of boiled pork, and go to the play on Friday night, with other facetiousness of the same original description. He grew weary, however, as the day wore on, and perhaps for the first time in his life felt a decided conviction that he was deliberately losing valuable time. So he sent for Carlyon, in whom, though they had never attained to any particularly close intimacy, he reposed great confidence. Bernard lost no time in obeying the summons.

"You don't look as if you were sorry to see me here," said Paul, shaking hands with Bernard.

"I am not, old fellow," replied Carlyon, "setting aside the present annoyance, because I think your visit here will get you into the right groove for the future. Now, have you any plan for yourself?"

"I have prepared a statement of my liabilities," said Paul with affected pompousness, "which I beg to place in your hands."

"A very good sign," said the other. "I give you credit for at once taking the bull by the horns. What's the total? Oh, come. Five hundred and fifty odd, eh? I fancied it would be more—you've everything down, I hope."

"Everything but the money you sent me to Southend the other day, to take me and the ladies out of pawn."

"Ah! well, that may stand," said Bernard, laughing. "I've a lien on the ladies, you know, and I have a strong notion that you'll want to pay me off, some of these days, as regards one of

them. Mrs. Bong, of course, I mean. But now, what do you propose?"

"There are but two courses open, I take it," said Paul. "I must pay these fellows, or wipe them out. Now, the first I can't take, and the second—"

"You shan't take. Let us try a third. Can you manage any money at all?"

"I have been considering that interesting problem. I think that by dint of several piteous letters, deploring the error of my past ways, stating that my eyes are now open, and engaging that if delivered from this slough of despond I would, with the help of Providence, pursue a new life in future, such letters being powdered with a good many quotations from the Prayer-book—you could stick them in for me, old fellow,—and perhaps blotted with some water drops, to be regarded in the light of my tears—or would that be too strong?—I could get two aunts and one godmother to come out with a hundred a-piece. But though they are good souls, and all that, they would insist on going regularly to work, and seeing that the tin was duly applied."

"So much the better. You write your letters, and, if you like, I will go and see your friends, and prove to them that it's all right."

"Just so; you are a brick; and you are so grave and plausible that they will conceive a great respect for you. I always joked myself out of their good graces."

"Never joke with dull people; a joke's lost if it's not understood, and a friend if it's misunderstood. Wait for a safe audience, and, in the meantime, talk about the weather, and the advantage of railways in promoting communication. But now, look here. If you get your three hundred, that is only about half of your debts, and if one aunt should refuse to melt, you are in a mess. I see that a number of these creditors are West-enders, who charge prices calculated on long credit, bad debts, splendid shop-fronts, and heavy rents. There is no particular reason for your paying for either. The course I advise is that you should send some fellow round to all these men and make them an offer. Pay all the little ones in full, and the others something more like what is fair. If you do not know a man who would *do it well*, I can introduce one to you."

"Who's that, Carlyon?"

"A man named Kether, a Jew, who will do your work capitally."

"I don't like Jews."

"Why not?"

"Well, because they are sure to cheat you."

"There are, down on this paper, from thirty to forty names of men who want to cheat you, and I don't see that one of them is a Jew's name. Is Jones, the man here who has run you up so awfully for costs, a Jew?"

"No, not he. He goes to an Ebenezer three times every Sunday, and whips his children like fun if they laugh when walking home—one of them told me so, poor little beast. But I don't like Jews."

"I do; and I fancy I know a good deal more about them than you do. An intellectual Jew is the best thinking-machine one sees in motion: he mixes the subtlety of the East with the energy of the West—what can stand against the union!"

"Nothing," said Paul, "and that's just what I say. You are certain to be done."

"No," replied Carlyon. "I would sooner confide a trust, involving difficulty, to a Jew of character, than to almost any other man."

"That's your heathenish respect for the head, without regard to the heart," said Mr. Chequerbent.

"You are wrong again, Paulus Æmilius," said his friend. "Head never wins in the long run, without heart, and it is because the quick, warm Oriental heart is always enlisted in the struggle, that the Hebrew triumphs over your mere shrewd man of business. However, I don't want to convert you to Judaism, but only to my particular child of Judah, Leon Kether; and if your prejudices are not too strong, I will at once go and try to find him."

"Leon—didn't he rule a wife and have a wife?" said Paul. "I wish I had followed his example in the latter particular, and then I should not have been here. Though, by the way, there's a poor fellow in the coffee-room whom marriage has not kept out of quod." And he briefly, but after his own fashion, told Carlyon the clerk's tale.

"Just so. He will be ruined," said Bernard quietly. "He will go over to prison, and, being rather a feeble creature, will

be speedily demoralized, and finally be discharged as a pauper under the Act. For the rest of his life he will be a shabby, sneaking, needy wretch, and his wife, who is unluckily pretty, will soon weary of such a companion, and find another or so. Two people, who, if they were a little cared for, would plod on contented and respected, will become rogue and the other thing. Now, if that man were a Jew, he would be taken in hand by four or five other Jews, who would lift him out of his scrape, taking special good care of themselves, too, and he would be kept on his little legs—it is the way with the Jews, and not altogether an unwise or an inhuman one.”

“Where did you pick up all your knowledge of them, I wonder, Carlyon? It seems to me that you have been into some queer corners in your time.”

“Perhaps I have,” said Bernard, “and now I will see in what queer corner I can find Leon Kether.”

In a short time Bernard returned, bringing Mr. Kether with him. The Hebrew was a small, compact, active man, dressed with scrupulous neatness, but without ornament of any kind. His features were strong, but the Jewish type was not very obvious, nor were Paul’s prejudices against the nation called into violent action by anything markedly Hebraic in the manner of his new acquaintance, which was easy and gentlemanlike. Kether, however, having speedily made out Paul, evidently regarded him as a child put into his hands for protection, and during the discussion on Mr. Chequerbent’s affairs, invariably turned to Bernard for a decision on any questionable point.


“I have no doubt I shall be able to manage most of these people,” said Mr. Kether. “I shall regularly prepare a schedule of your liabilities for the Insolvent Court, and call upon the various persons as if to ascertain whether you have stated their debts accurately, preparatory to your passing. Then, you see, they will be inclined to look at any middle course as clear gain to themselves, which, indeed, it will be.”

“And any time hereafter, you know,” said Carlyon, “when you are rich, you can reward their moderation by paying them their additional charges for their carved shop-fronts and for their bad debts. It is a comfort to you to know that.”

“A great consolation,” said Paul. “Indeed, such a payment *is the one thing* to which I look forward with rapture.”

CHAPTER XXV.

A QUARTER OF A MINUTE.

“HEARSING a charade, young people?” said Mrs. Forester, who followed Heywood into the room, as Mary Maynard was extricating herself from Carlyon’s unresisting arms. “May one know the word? I am a great authority in such matters, though really I do not think that I could improve this part of the performance. What do you say, Mr. Heywood?”

“Such things are not much in my way,” said the priest, carelessly, “but our good young Secretary seems to act with much ease, and as if he had previously rehearsed the situation.”

“Not with me,” said Miss Maynard, very calmly walking to a mirror and rearranging her hair, “as we never met in our lives, at least, so far as I know, until this evening. He is not a bad actor, but he wants enthusiasm. But you may remember your promise, Mr. Bernard,” she added, returning to the table and taking a seat, “and you may give me some of those white grapes.”

Carlyon obeyed, not exactly sorry to be employed; for the situation, which certainly he had not done much to bring about, began to be a sort of false position.

“Mr. Heywood knows the word,” he said, “and therefore it is useless to go on with the charade, which has increased my opinion of his talents. The second part must be very clever to be half so good as the first.”

“I dare say it will give your talents some scope,” said Heywood, dryly. “I should not have intruded at such an hour, Mrs. Forester, but for hearing from Lord Rookbury that you had a party. I never interrupt such conclaves, except by accident, as Carlyon knows. By the way, Bernard, I am in St. Alban’s Place—look in upon me.”

The tone of the little group became constrained, and Mrs. Forester declared that she meant to be at church in the morning, and would not be kept up any longer.

“Very liberal in you to call that ugly, pokey, proprietary preaching-house a church,” said Heywood. “Even as a

Catholic, I am surprised at you, while that Protestant Giovanni there must be actually shocked. Why don't you give things their right names, Mrs. Forester?"

"The edifice is nothing—the edification everything," said beautiful Mrs. Forester, demurely.

"It is the Minister that draws you there, then," said Heywood in an undertone. "So I hear. Does he lend you a Secretary to carry your prayer-book?"

"It is not you who ought to tease me," said the lady, but not looking in the least offended. And soon afterwards the men went away.

"I like her having you here," said Heywood, with a quiet laugh, almost before the door had closed on them. "I do like it. There's a new display of that amiable straightforward perseverance which is the great charm of some women. 'She'll have your master yet, Sir, your Evangelical Talus of the iron flail. Won't even let his Secretary alone, but gets up a supper and a flirtation for him the instant he is installed. Don't be ungrateful, Bernard Carlyon. It is a sad wicked world, but show it an example. Help the poor woman if you can, and especially give her the earliest information of Selwyn's movements. Will he be at chapel to-day?'"

"I hardly know," replied Bernard, wishing to try whether Heywood thought him mystified. "But as a matter of the merest guess, I should say that he would not."

"Then you are clearly defrauding Mrs. Forester of her supper and the other little amusements provided for you, by going away and leaving her in error. Go back and tell her."

"And perhaps prevent her receiving nobody knows how much—what did she term it?—edification. No, no, I hope I am more scrupulous," replied Bernard, with gravity. Some further talk in the same tone brought them to Jermyn Street.

The Rotherhithe House party had been on the Friday, and the supper in Park Street on the Saturday. On the following Tuesday morning Bernard received a letter from Aspen Court, where Mrs. Wilmslow begged his immediate presence. The letter was short, but so earnest, that Carlyon, whose regard for the writer had attained a warmth unusual with him, resolved to obey the summons. A *congé* from Selwyn was speedily obtained, but it occurred to Bernard that as his connexion with

the Wilmslows had originated solely in his position with Mr. Molesworth, it would be proper to inform that person that he proposed to revisit them. He made, therefore, for Red Lion Square, but found from his old comrades that Mr. Molesworth had left town for some days—not, however, for Gloucestershire. Carlyon, therefore, wrote to Mr. Molesworth, apprising him of his intention to run down to Aspen, and departed by the railway. During the journey he naturally speculated as to the emergency which had caused Mrs. Wilmslow to summon him, and pretty speedily settled that the case was one of pecuniary mishap. In fact, he pictured Henry Wilmslow lolling on one of the couches in his smoking-room, and drinking brandy-and-water with a brace of dirty but jocose custodians.

At one of those huge stations, where the line expands into a great area of iron ways, and where superficial people may suppose that the rolling stock is bred, from the multitude of loose engines, large and small, straying and feeding in all directions, and running into and out of sheds, apparently at their own whim, the Gloucester train stopped. A few minutes later, and as the bell rang for the down-train travellers to finish their excellent soup, and leave off admiring the far-glancing Daughters of the Rail who serve it, and whose tasteful toilettes make travelling dowdies very sarcastic for the first half hour after lunch, the up-train arrived. Bernard had regained his own corner of the carriage, as the latter train glided slowly to a stand-still, and a moving panorama of faces slid past him. The newly arriving train stopped, and he was face to face with Lilian Trevelyan.

In a moment, of course, Bernard's heart was in a flutter, and his hand extended. But no little hand came from the opposite window to meet his own. Lilian looked at him steadily for a moment, he thought, sorrowfully, and then, seeming to catch a glance from her opposite companion, bowed very slightly, and with averted eye, and cast her eyes upon a book on her lap. The railway whistle shrieked, and all was over in far less time than it has taken to tell it.

It is to be feared that Carlyon's mind was little occupied, during the remainder of that journey, with plans for Mrs. Wilmslow's benefit.

What worlds would he have flung away to have been able to persuade himself that in the hurry, and the travelling cap, and

the shadow of the station roof, he had not been recognised. Even such a wounding thought as that—the thought that the chosen of his heart should not have made him out by the least glimpse of one feature—a thought that under any other circumstances he would have spurned from him in wrath—such a conviction would, at that moment, have been unspeakable consolation. But, wonderful as is a lover's power of compelling himself to believe what he desires to believe, some things are beyond him. The *credo quia impossibile est* of theology will not hold good in love-affairs. Lilian knew him as well as he knew her. They had met but for a quarter of a minute, but each had had time to read a whole history in the face of the other, and to know that the other had done the same. There was no rejecting the mystery—it must be solved.

Needless to say which way Bernard's convictions went. Certain suspicions of his own, relative to the little scene at Mrs. Forester's, instantly attracted other suspicions which were floating in the atmosphere of the young gentleman's perturbed imagination, and the whole were speedily agglomerated into a coherent plot against him. A practical mind, too, was Bernard's, and of course practical men never go wrong. Mr. Heywood had seen the affair with Mary Maynard, on the Sunday morning, and had therefore had ample time to write a full account of it to Miss Trevelyan; and she was naturally offended, and having no time for explanation, and not choosing to be hypocritical, and smile when angry, had taken the only means in her power to let him see her feelings.

The first shock of the incident of course jarred upon all sensation, and set Bernard wrong with everybody and everything around him. It inspired him with a contemptuous dislike of his fellow-travellers, made him regard the beautiful country about him as hard and commonplace, and caused him to feel that the journey he had undertaken would be a failure, and that he was foolish and hasty in making it. For a little shake puts the human instrument vilely out of tune,—and that quarter of a minute had a whole world of discouragement in it. But we get over these things. In a short time Carlyon began to review the matter more calmly, and he had scarcely done so when sunshine broke in upon his mind, and a few miles further on the journey *which was separating him from Lilian*, he might have been

found comforting himself with great earnestness. First, he thought of the sorrowful look which had crossed her face for a second, and this cheered him exceedingly ; for, as he argued, with remarkable novelty, no one looks sorrowful except when a strong interest is felt. So that he really began to be obliged to Lilian for having given him so delightful an assurance of her regard. How indignantly he now spurned at the possibility that he had not been recognised, it is not necessary to say.

Then he began to calculate how speedily he could come to an explanation with her—hardly before the following evening—and this naturally brought him to the consideration of what he should say. The truth? No man really and honestly in love ever told the truth yet. If he states things as they are, he sees them from a point of view which no lover can occupy. It is quite enough for him to state them as he wishes them to be. Else, he only vindicates his truth as an historian at the expense of his truth as a lover, and is a sober man affecting to be intoxicated—a contemptible sight, at the best, and infinitely less respectable than the intoxicated man affecting to be sober. I will not outrage Carlyon's character by assuming that he was so false and hollow as to think of telling Lilian the truth. He was only thinking how best he should put the matter, so as to arrive most speedily at the greatest happiness for both—a complete reconciliation. He might have saved himself much trouble, and Mary Maynard's black hair would not have come sweeping across his mental eye so often, if he had known that Lilian had never heard of his having supped in Park Street.

What, he wondered, had Heywood said? There was one comfort, he must have written, for Bernard had called that morning in St. Alban's Place, and missed him by a few minutes only. So that there was a letter, which Lilian would produce, and its falsehoods and false colouring (detestable things, thought Bernard) could be exposed. Meantime he could trust in her affection, which would be strong enough, he argued, to forgive him, if wrong, and which ought therefore, assuredly, to acquit him where the case was doubtful. Herein he reasoned, perhaps, with more logic than experience, as some authorities hold, that, in love matters, you had better be guilty than be wrongly suspected, first, inasmuch as you will be much more earnest, and therefore much more successful in obtaining a reconcilia-

tion ; and secondly, as you will appeal to the heart, rather than to the head of your mistress. But this is mere scandal, let us hope.

So, comforting himself, Carlyon could even acknowledge the beauty of the sunset, in which the rich Gloucestershire foliage was waving and glowing.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE OWL AGAIN.



O far from finding the Ambassador in the state of detention which Carlyon had considered probable, the latter, as his chaise turned the last corner, and approached the house, beheld Mr. Henry Wilmslow walking up and down the terrace. As the sound of wheels reached his ear, the owner of Aspen Court gazed out sternly, his hand upon his forehead, to ascertain who was venturing upon his domain. And, seated near the large door, and in the full warmth of the evening sun, was another figure speedily recognised by Bernard. It was that of Lord Rookbury. Henry Wilmslow's look of surprise as he recognised Carlyon, was not lost upon the latter.

"She has not told him, trusting to my having sense enough to manage it, and I have blundered. By Jove ! though, I'll make a dash for it, and save her a scene with that ass."

"So ho ! Master Lawyer," exclaimed the gentleman Bernard had thus designated. "Who expected you, I wonder ? What's in the wind now ?"

"That's the only way," thought Carlyon, alighting. "Why," he said, "surely, I can't have beaten Mr. Molesworth ?"

"Hang it, I don't know why you shouldn't," retorted Henry Wilmslow, brilliantly ; "he deserves beating, I dare say, as much as any other of the trade. Present company always excepted, of course, ha ! ha !"

"Thanks for the exception, which certainly mends matters," said Bernard. "But do you mean to say that Mr. Molesworth is not here ?"

"Here ! no, man," said the Ambassador, whose grin rapidly *toned down* into a discomfited expression, as he began to com-

prehend that the lawyer was coming. "What should he do here?"

"That he must tell you himself," said Bernard, "for I have no idea why he should come. All I know is, that I was in his office this morning—that I was requested to come down here, and that he left town before I did. Since you say he has not arrived, he must be detained somewhere. I must ask your hospitality until the mystery is cleared up."

"I say, Lord Rookbury," said Henry, walking away from Bernard without replying, "here's a screw loose." And going up to his noble friend, he communicated the news.

"What, Mr. Secretary," said the Earl, "leaving the Government to take care of itself, while you run into the country after the ladies? I cautioned you against that sort of thing at Rotherhithe House—it won't do for a man who has his way to make. Wait till you are a Premier, and *then*."

"If he has come with that view, he'll be devilishly sold, won't he, my Lord?" said Henry. "Bird's flown, Mr. Secretary," added the Ambassador, with an ill-bred man's readiness to catch up a familiarity. "Nobody here but Mrs. Wilmslow," said her husband. "But if you want anything to eat, I recommend you to go and make love to her for it." And with this gracious intimation he turned his back upon Carlyon, and spoke in a lower voice to the Earl.

"Being dreadfully famished," said Bernard, "I will avail myself of your permission." And he was passing into the house, when Lord Rookbury said, looking keenly at him,

"I say, Mr. Carlyon, you are no longer in Molesworth's employ—how happens it that you are doing his errands?"

"I conclude," said Bernard, carelessly, "that my having so recently had much to do with Mr. Wilmslow's business made it not unreasonable to ask me to attend on an emergency."

"And what is the emergency? for I know nothing about it, nor does my friend Mr. Wilmslow, I believe."

"Not I," said Henry, pleased at the title of Lord Rookbury's friend, and disposed to be haughty thereupon. "And it seems a d—d queer thing to me, and, in fact, not the thing at all, that a set of lawyers should be rushing into a gentleman's house without giving him notice of any kind."

"I'll stop *this*," muttered Bernard, beginning to get indignant.

"I thought, Mr. Wilmslow," he said, "that you had had enough of notices from lawyers, in your time, not to make you so particularly eager for them."

"Neatly planted," said Lord Rookbury, who was always most amiably impartial in applauding a hit, whether friend or foe suffered. His approbation stifled any retort from Wilmslow, and Bernard, not sorry to cut the discussion short, raised his hat and entered the house. Crossing the well-known hall, he proceeded, unannounced, to Mrs. Wilmslow's drawing-room.

"Hear what he says to your wife," said the Earl, quickly.

He should have spoken more clearly, knowing what a donkey he had to deal with. Perhaps, however, the British Peer would hardly have cared to say, "Listen at the door," though that was what he meant, and what he gave Henry credit for having understood, when the latter came back with the account that Carlyon had said to Mrs. Wilmslow just what he had said to them, and that she looked very glad to see him.

"How do you know how she looked?" said the Earl.

"Why, wasn't I in the room?" said Henry, simply.

"Oh! you were in the room! Ah! to be sure, you were in the room. Of course you were in the room. How the light falls on that water, beyond the plantation there! Noble place this, Wilmslow, and one that deserves to be in good hands."

"Your Lordship is very good to flatter me," said Mr. Wilmslow, who did not see the expression, neither good nor flattering, which Lord Rookbury put on in reply to the acknowledgment.

In the meantime Mrs. Wilmslow and Bernard were coming to their own explanations. Jane explained that she had intended to meet him, but had found it impossible to go out unobserved, and she thanked him for his *ruse*, deploring that she was compelled to the humiliation of being thankful for a piece of deception. And after every hurried apology for calling Bernard into the country, and begging him to pardon any questions which might seem peremptory, but which she feared might be interrupted if she put them less quickly, she entreated him to explain to her precisely the position of herself and her husband in regard to the Aspen Court property.

It will be remembered, I hope, that in one of the very earliest chapters of this book we have seen that Carlyon, anticipating *this very question*, demanded of his then employer how he

should answer it, and gave a certain promise in consequence of its being found that Bernard knew far more than Molesworth had intended.

"Do not," replied Carlyon, "suppose that I am hesitating over an answer. But it will, perhaps, not retard explanation, Mrs. Wilmslow, if you tell me why you now require, hastily, what you had so many opportunities of asking at leisure when I was staying here."

"Oh, Mr. Carlyon," she answered, "if you could understand my feelings—if you could comprehend the state of gratitude and tranquillity into which a mother is lifted, when she suddenly finds herself able to remove her children from a condition—" and here poor Jane, whose nerves were obviously all unstrung, began to weep at old recollections. Self-possession returned to her after some moments, and she continued, "I can only say that we had had troubles enough, and I was too glad of an interval of peace to care to disturb it by asking about the future. But now I must know all, for deeper matters are involved than mere money. Bernard, let me speak to you as a mother might speak to her son. Is that Lord Rookbury your friend?"

"We were strangers till we became acquainted in hunting. The first day we passed together he offered to serve me, and did."

"For his own purposes."

"Why does any one serve another? Lord Rookbury began rather earlier in our acquaintanceship than usual, that is all."

"Do not speak so, at least not to me, Bernard," said Mrs. Wilmslow, turning her still beautiful blue eyes with a kindly expression (but that they always had) full upon him. "For I know that you yourself would do much to serve poor me, who can do nothing for you in return."

"And God knows, if you believe that, Mrs. Wilmslow," said the young man, moved out of his ordinary self-possession, "you amply repay anything I could do. And now tell me, what is it that you apprehend from Lord Rookbury? Be quite sure that you can tell me nothing about him that will startle me."

"And—you—say—that," said Jane, slowly, gazing on him with that steady yet vacant expression which may precede either a shriek or a fall. But she struggled with her heart, good, loving creature that she was, and, for the time conquered. "He is a very bad man," she repeated, in a gentle, low voice.

"Nay, nay, do not let us make things blacker than they need be," said Bernard, strangely puzzled. "Bad and good in these days are words of comparison, and I dare say Lord Rookbury is not worse than many people who are thought better. But what on earth, dear Mrs. Wilmslow, can this old man's character be to you, that the question should agitate you thus? Do I guess right—that he has become Mr. Wilmslow's creditor? Well, Wilmslow had better—I am sorry to say it to you—have sought out the keenest usurer in London, because he will be equally cheated, and be obliged to bear with the cheat in silence; but your property will gradually recover itself, and our noble friend will be paid; and—but you do not listen—you are very ill. May I call a servant?"

"I am very ill, but I am listening," said Mrs. Wilmslow, with forced calmness. "Sit down. So he is most cruel and exacting in money dealings?"

"So they say. But there is this also said, namely, that his avarice is a whim rather than a habit—it is not money for its own sake that he cares about, but as a means of power—and he sometimes does things that are liberal enough. Mr. Wilmslow, if he be Lord Rookbury's debtor,—you do not contradict me—may have the good fortune to be dealt with kindly. But without relying on this, which would be foolish, let us see what can be done."

"Bernard, you have seen Lord Rookbury at home?"

"Yes, you remember I passed a night at Rookton Woods. It was then that he offered me the introduction to Mr. Selwyn."

"Whom did you see there beside the Earl?"

"An exceedingly pretty little girl named Lurline, whom I should have taken for his grandchild, but that he has no married children, and who afterwards called him papa; she may have been some adopted favourite."

"You know, Bernard, that it is not so?"

"I have no right to know it—nor do I. But, to speak as frankly as you ought to be spoken to, I have one clue to Lurline's history. Looking at the Earl's pictures, I accidentally said that I liked what was pretty, and cared little about legitimacy. He said, with his curious curl of the lip,"—Jane shuddered—"that Rookton Woods might be able to gratify me; and, *later in the evening*, the child puzzled me by saying that I had

promised to be fond of her. The nonsense is not worth repeating."

"On your honour, Bernard, did you see that child's mother?"

"No, upon my honour; nor have I the slightest reason to know that such a person exists."

"Bernard," she said, in a calm, sad voice, "I am a helpless woman in a lonely house. I have no money—it is all taken away—and I am watched for fear I should escape. No creature so powerless can be imagined. And they have taken my children from me, all my children. Even my little darling Amy, they have taken her too. Ah! I see what you are thinking, but I am as rational as yourself, Bernard."

"But, dear Mrs. Wilmslow, what are you saying? We do not take away children in these days, at least not by force, and without law. You, who—may I say it—have always been my model of reason and kindness,—I am utterly ashamed to find myself presuming to offer you advice—but surely there must be some strange misunderstanding. Who could take the young ladies away from Aspen?" He hardly knew what he said, for such a revelation from the calm, mild Jane Wilmslow, made him doubt whether he were dreaming or awake.

"There was no force used, and no law, Mr. Carlyon, nor was it necessary. Yesterday Mr. Wilmslow drove up to his door in a phaeton which has been lent him by Lord Rookbury, and took the three girls for a drive. He returned at night without them."

"Having left them, where—in heaven's name? Pshaw," he added, "I am a fool for helping to agitate you. He has left them on a visit—where?"

"At the seat of your friend, Lord Rookbury, at Rookton Woods."

"Well," said Bernard, "it was a strange thing to do, a very strange thing; but, except for its strangeness, I see no very great harm in it, and, certainly, nothing to cause you all this distress. Surely, it cannot be necessary to say that, at Rookton Woods, the house of a nobleman old enough to be their grandfather, they will receive the most graceful attention, and I am only surprised that Lord Rookbury is below, and not taking you across the country to join them."

"You have not heard all, Bernard."

"No, I feel that," said Carlyon; "tell me what I am sure I should hear."

"Lord Rookbury has proposed for Emma."

"The old Earl—has proposed to marry Miss Wilmslow!" repeated Carlyon, fairly astonished this time; "and she—but she could hardly hesitate."

"If forty years had been taken from his age, and the union rendered rational, Emma would have hesitated as little as she did when he asked for her hand in that hall. Emma loves her mother, and comprehends what her mother has endured;—no earthly temptation could induce a daughter of Jane Tracy to marry a profligate."

"He was refused, of course. And do I understand that, after that, and knowing it, Mr. Wilmslow—"

"Yes. You have described Lord Rookbury, and best know whether he is a man likely to be deterred by a girl's rejection, when that girl's family is in his power. Mr. Wilmslow is his slave, and I am—my husband's."

"Pardon me," said Carlyon, speaking something hastily, "but all this sounds like an affair of the stage, not of reality. I can understand that Mr. Wilmslow owes Lord Rookbury money, and may, therefore, be under his influence; but, when we come to forced marriages on account of simple debts, we are surely giving play to—to imagination. Why, Molesworth would have paid the debt a dozen times. Why did you not apprise him?"

"You will refuse to believe, too, that I was watched, and my letters suppressed, until Emma had gone away: then, constraint was no longer needed—I instantly wrote to you."

"But how does this visit advance the suit? Do you believe in dungeon-chapels and midnight marriages? Dear Mrs. Wilmslow, are you not playing with your fears?"

"I am speaking of my child," replied Mrs. Wilmslow, simply.

"I still confess to you that I cannot comprehend how Miss Wilmslow's visit to Rookton Woods, curiously timed though it is, should advance Lord Rookbury's suit for her hand."


"Bernard," said Mrs. Wilmslow, with a deadly calmness, "my husband has, through the last twenty years, brought many sad and shameful things to the knowledge of his wife—God *forgive him for it!* the fearful teaching has not been lost. Do

you not understand me? My child has been the guest of Lurline's mother!"

Wilmslow's loud, sycophant laugh, and the footsteps of himself and of the Earl in the passage spared Carlyon a reply.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SECRETS COME OUT.

"ONFIDENTIAL communications broken off," murmured the Earl to himself, as he entered the room with Henry Wilmslow. "Our young secretary is diplomatising without his patron's leave. Well, Mr. Carlyon," he said, "how did the Forester supper go off? I was honoured with orders to attend, but could not. I hope the esteemed lady was hospitable."

"More hospitable than Mrs. Wilmslow," said Carlyon, who thought that Jane would, perhaps, be glad to make her escape,—"for although I have pleaded my extreme need, I have heard no orders given for my comfort."

"I am sure I beg your pardon, Bernard," said Mrs. Wilmslow, catching at once her young friend's eye and meaning, and rising to leave the room.

"There's a bell, Mrs. Wilmslow, I suppose," said Henry, with a dictatorial manner, intended to prevent her going.

"But I have rung it four times without any result," said Bernard very coolly, and opening the door for Jane, who went out rather hastily under cover of this little bit of protection.

"A vision of Mr. Carlyon's future triumphs," said Lord Rookbury. "He has opened his budget so engrossingly that dinner is quite forgotten in the House. And how do you get on with the religious and gracious Selwyn? He gives me a very good account of your capacities," said the Earl, "and I think that if you would let him convert you, he would most likely introduce you to a capital match, by way of proving that Providence takes care of the believer. I would not, were I in your place," added his Lordship significantly, "let any trifle stand in the way of my spiritual and temporal prosperity."

"Such a prize is one of the things which your Lordship likes to see *won* by those in whom you are good enough to be in-

terested," returned Bernard, reverting to Lord Rookbury's hint given him at Rookton Woods.

"By Jove, I should say so! an heiress with a certainty," said his Lordship, emphasizing the last word, "is exactly the person a young man should look out for. What do you say, Father Wilmslow?"

"That's the time of day, my Lord," said Henry, on whom the last two or three speeches had, of course, been lost. "And these lawyers have such opportunities, looking into people's title-deeds and settlements, and knowing how the land lays."

"A good shot, Carlyon," said the Earl, looking hard at him.

"I suppose it is," said Bernard carelessly, "but I have been in London so long that I have forgotten all about shooting."

"And have you forgotten all about the young ladies of Aspen?" said the Earl, "as I have not heard you make any inquiries concerning them. Now," said Lord Rookbury to himself, "he must reply that he has heard all that from their mamma."

"Mr. Wilmslow mentioned to me, as soon as I arrived, that they were away from home," said Carlyon, who saw that an *éclaircissement* must come, but also saw no use in precipitating it.

"But did not tell you that they are staying at Rookton Woods, as of course Mrs. Wilmslow did."

"Really," said Bernard, "one almost needs some second assurance of that fact."

"What for?" said Henry bluntly. "Is there anything extraordinary in the Miss Wilmslows going to visit his Lordship, their neighbour in the county, and if I may say so, my Lord, their father's friend. I don't understand your observation, Mr. Carlyon, which seems quite uncalled-for."

"Do not let me be misunderstood," said Bernard, with much deference; "I only meant, that with three such very agreeable visitors at Rookton, one felt surprised to meet Lord Rookbury anywhere else."

"There it is, Wilmslow," said his Lordship, laughing, "these young fellows cannot imagine it possible for older men to deny themselves the pleasure of the society of women, even when grave matters are in question."

"I could not be aware of these gravities, you know," said Carlyon.

"Why, you come and announce them," said Lord Rookbury, sharply; "you tell us of an emergency, and that Mr. Molesworth, the great lawyer, is coming down, and that you are torn from the business of your country to help him, and then you say that you are not aware of grave matters being in question, Are you not a little inconsistent, my young diplomat?"

A little less self-possession, and the fiction Carlyon had devised for poor Jane's benefit had at once been scattered. But Bernard met Lord Rookbury's suspicious eye very steadily, and replied,—

"But may I ask how my news, brought an hour ago, aided to bring your Lordship from Rookton Woods, which you must have left before I even entered the county?"

"He stands cross-examining very well," said the Earl, with a smile. "I shall leave him to you, Wilmslow." For in truth, though the keen old man believed that Carlyon had come down on Mrs. Wilmslow's request, he did not wish to mortify Bernard, whom he liked, by pressing the point, and much preferred that Henry should give the offence.

"Meantime, as a witness is entitled to refreshment," said Carlyon, "I will see whether mine is in progress." And he left the room, a manœuvre which occurred to the Earl as something like that of castling, in chess, when, an attack being prepared, the citadel itself suddenly shifts its place.

"Your wife has managed to send to Molesworth," said Lord Rookbury, as soon as the door closed, "and he has chosen to get this youngster to come down to reconnoitre. That is the state of matters, Wilmslow."

"Curse his impudence," said the Ambassador, angrily. "Don't you think I ought to kick him out of my house?"

What a mischievous old man that Lord was. Of course he had not the slightest idea of recommending any such course, but he knew that Wilmslow was a coward, and instantly determined to torment him.

"Your high gentlemanly spirit," he said, "has pointed out the proper course, as I knew it would." And as Henry's face grew graver under this unexpected answer, Lord Rookbury quite chuckled.

"You think he ought to be turned out?" said Mr. Wilmslow, immediately softening the form of proceeding.

"Kicked out," said the ruthless Earl, "was your first expression, I think. And the impulses of a nature like yours may be safely trusted," he added, respectfully.

"The only thing that makes me hesitate," said Henry, "is the thought that he is in some way, I believe, a friend of your Lordship's. That is the only thing, and the respect I have for you would make me suppress my natural indignation, and simply tell him—tell him in a note perhaps,—that he had better go away."

"My dear Wilmslow," said the unhallowed peer, getting up and clasping the other's hand, "I fully feel all your delicacy. But it shall never be said that your friendship for Charles, Earl of Rookbury, prevented the due assertion of your honour. Act, therefore, as you deem that honour dictates."

And the two humbugs stood for a moment hand in hand.

"My Lord," said Henry, "my feeling tells me instantly to go and thrust this Mr. Carlyon out of my doors. The only thing is ('another only thing,' said the Earl to himself, all the time looking affectionately at his friend) that perhaps we ought to make it quite clear that the matter is as we suppose, which you know we can scarcely say we have ascertained. And then, you see, these lawyers make so much out of assaults that a gentleman is never safe in acting as he desires. Does the thing strike your Lordship in that light?"

"Well," said the Earl, thoughtfully, having amused himself enough, and letting his victim down, "there is sense in that, too. On the whole, then, you think that you had better at present abstain from any extreme course, and in the meantime endeavour to elucidate the position of circumstances."

Long words always charm long ears, and Henry Wilmslow was duly charmed, and Carlyon was unmolested.

"But now, Wilmslow," said Lord Rookbury, "look here. Carlyon is a mere interloper, and not entitled to interfere in your affairs, but Molesworth is in another position. He has your title-deeds, you tell me, and is your creditor to a very large amount. Have you thought over your affairs, as you promised, and come to any sort of idea as to what is your debt to him?"

"I have been thinking like the very deuce," said Henry, "but *the transactions* run over so many years that I am fairly be-

wildered. We must have had a precious deal of money out of him, besides his costs."

"Have you no account of his—did he never give you any?"

"I seem to think," said Henry, musing, "that when we signed those last things he did show me something."

"Signed what, signed when, signed where?" said the Earl, quickly; "You never told me of that. Let's hear all about it. What were they, eh? That's the main point."

"Well, if you ask me that," said Henry, slowly.

"I do—of course," said the impatient peer.

"All that I can say is that I am hanged if I can tell you," continued Mr. Wilmslow. "Jane seemed to understand them, but I don't know whether she did, women are such humbugs."

"If she did she won't tell now," said the Earl, promptly. "But confound you, man, you must know whether the things were mortgages, or settlements, what their general nature was. You would not be such a preposterous jackass as to go and sign in the dark."

"No, it was not in the dark," said the literal Henry; "though, by the way, the light was not a very good one, being only a lamp, with a shade to it."

"Ah!" said Lord Rookbury, snatching at the merest trifle, "then you signed them at night, after regular hours of business. Who saw you sign?—some of his clerks, eh?"

"No," said Wilmslow, "I know all of them, having had to see them a good deal too often. I think Molesworth had somebody upstairs, whom he called down to witness our signing."

"And at night, too, but there might be nothing in that," pondered Lord Rookbury.

"Yes," said Henry Wilmslow, "there was something in it. I have no secrets from you, my Lord, since you have honoured me with your friendship."

"Nor I any from you, my dear fellow, for when one finds a kindred spirit, one trusts everything to him," said the Earl; "you know I told you only yesterday about Mother Carbuncle, so get on."

"You did so, my Lord," said Henry, "and I hope I am worthy of your confidence. I was going to say that the real reason why this business was transacted at night was that—that I, being rather under a cloud, and I may say up a tree—"

"Deuced odd places for the father of a family!" interjaculaed Lord Rookbury.

"Deuced uncomfortable ones!" said Henry, shrugging, "and it was rather the ticket for me to be scarce until the Philistines had shut up, you see."

"Confound your slang!" said the hasty Earl, speaking of course with the freedom of friendship to the man he had just eulogised. "You mean that you were afraid to be out in the daylight because of the bailiffs!"

"Something of that sort," said Henry, a little sulkily, for the Earl had dashed at him unceremoniously.

"Don't mind my plain speaking, my dear Wilmslow," said Lord Rookbury, "I must like a man very much indeed before I frankly let him know my mind. And this was your condition when you signed the deeds. When was this?"

"Not long before we came here."

"But after the decision which gave you Aspen Court?"

"Certainly, certainly, my Lord. I remember there was something about Aspen Court in the deeds."

"I'll be bound there was," said the Earl. "Tell me, Wilmslow, did Molesworth give you any money then?"

"Yes," said Henry, "then, and about that time, we had a pretty lump, but I forget the amount."

"Now," said the Earl to himself, "this is what Selwyn would call a clear manifestation of Providence in my behalf. Signed deeds. Of course he did. That I should for a moment have lost sight of that probability. Had Emma's point-blank refusal anything to do with Molesworth's arrangements, or—I wonder whether—Miss Kate—and he was in Molesworth's confidence too. I say, Wilmslow," he said suddenly, "let's go and talk to Carlyon—that is, if you have no insuperable aversion."

"What you can do, my Lord," said Henry, unconscious of any sarcasm in what he uttered, "I may surely do. He is, I dare say, upstairs, in what my wife calls the library, because she has no books, ha! ha!"

"No news of Mr. Molesworth yet?" asked Lord Rookbury, as he came in, followed, of course, by the master of the house.

"None," said Bernard. "But he has a wonderful knack of always turning up at the right time."

"Very pleasant," said the Earl, "especially if he turns up a

trump, as no doubt we shall find him. What do you say, Mrs. Wilmslow?"

"We found Mr. Molesworth a kind friend in our small troubles," said Jane, meekly, "and a successful champion in our large ones. But what a man will be at the last, I am afraid we must wait for the last to know."

"You speak as if you had reason to doubt him," said the Earl, with that happy manner, evincing interest but avoiding intrusion, which he had studied so carefully, and found so useful, especially with women of the best class.

"Ah, no," said poor Jane, "my days for trusting or doubting are pretty well done." And her eyes glistened, but she affected to busy herself about some household trifle, and concealed her agitation.

"Why, Mr. Carlyon, what can you have been saying to Mrs. Wilmslow to make her so melancholy?" said Lord Rookbury. You are a nice person to enliven the Bower of Beauty, as we used to call a lady's room, in my younger days."

"On the contrary," said Bernard, "I almost venture to hope that I have talked Mrs. Wilmslow into something like cheerfulness."

"You have brought her some good news, then? Of course I must not ask what they are, but perhaps her husband may."

"Certainly, I have a right to hear them," said Wilmslow.

"Why, no," said Carlyon, who determined to meet the inquisitorial tendencies of Lord Rookbury's conversation as quietly as possible, "I had nothing so dignified as news to tell, but I tried to make some London gossip acceptable—not a very easy task, for Mrs. Wilmslow does not much care for such things, but she has been so good as to listen, and I think to laugh. What an excellent look-out these windows give—almost the best in the line."

"Ask Mrs. Wilmslow to give you the room when she gives you Miss Kate," said Lord Rookbury, jerking the startling speech into the middle of the group, like a shell.

It hit the three others very suddenly and very hard. They all three sat for a moment, as if nothing had been said, and then the shell exploded. Carlyon coloured with a mixed feeling, in which, however, anger was a large component. Mrs. Wilmslow experienced a choking sensation which perhaps prevented her

from quite knowing at the instant what hurt she felt. While the coarser nature of Wilmslow received its shock of surprise, and immediately broke out. He began of course, with an oath, and proceeded—

“Give him Miss Kate! your Lordship is joking. But if I thought that my wife had been encouraging the young gentleman in any such d—d idea, I’d ——.” He clenched his fist and ground his teeth, his oratorical resources not supplying him on the instant with a threat of sufficient terror. Lord Rookbury smiled to see how instinctively Wilmslow’s rage walked away from the two men, and settled upon his helpless wife. Wilmslow was a worthy Englishman, as police reports go.

Carlyon was the next to speak, and, in the confusion of ideas which followed the Earl’s remark, his mind snatched at the first one which offered, and which was almost forced upon him by Wilmslow.

“The young gentleman, Mr. Wilmslow,” he said, haughtily, “is not in the habit of accepting any encouragement which can expose the person who gives it to insult. I don’t suppose that you can understand how offensive your speech is, and certainly it is not in Mrs. Wilmslow’s presence that I can reply to it as it deserves. But if you will be good enough to imagine that I have said to you exactly what you would least like to hear, you will much oblige me.”

Henry’s wrath had been such a mere impulse that it speedily slunk away from its duty of sustaining him in the face of a counter-onslaught. But still, under the eyes of his wife and his patron, a man must show some fight, and Wilmslow felt himself bound to bluster out something about infernal mistakes, and people forgetting their position. But then the woman’s turn came, and, as usual, the male and superior creatures had cause to be ashamed of the figures they made in contrast.

“Bernard,” she said, “for my sake you will do as you have before done in this unhappy house. You will refrain from angry words. But I do ask you to speak, and in full confidence in your honour, I beg you to say, not to Lord Rookbury, and to Mr. Wilmslow, but to a mother whose heart is nearly breaking, whether there has ever passed, between yourself and my child, *one word* that justifies what Lord Rookbury has said. Look in *my face*, Bernard, and answer me.”

She raised those blue eyes, sadly, but trustfully, and awaited his reply.

"Not one," he said, with great earnestness. What was there lurking at the young man's conscience which told him at that moment that solemnly as he spoke, his voice fell upon his own ear with some short-coming? That he spoke the truth, yet that it needed some irresistible confirmation? Was it a weakness, or a merit, that looking into that troubled mother's face, he determined to give that confirmation, though it was the yielding up a secret he would gladly have kept? A moment sufficed for the doubt and the decision, and then he added—(count it in his favour—he often goes wrong)—

"And although an unjustifiable speech ought not to compel me to say more, it is to you, and for your sake, dear Mrs. Wilmslow, that I will say one other word. My affections have very long been placed in the keeping of one whom you never saw, and—"

She would not let him finish, but took both his hands, held them for a moment, and then dropping them, sank upon a couch and wept outright. But I do not believe that her tears were those of sorrow, but that if we could search into the mysteries of a mother's love, her heart was reviving, after a harsh and sudden shock, and was rejoicing that a child's confidence had not been stolen away from her. I think that Jane Wilmslow had suffered too much of mere insult and outrage in her time to feel the ordinary indignation which Lord Rookbury's speech would have called up in a mother untried by the results of a marriage with a man who had been "a little too gay."

It was now Lord Rookbury's turn, and if anybody who reads this story could have seen that old man's face, the kindness, and the appearance of being himself a good deal hurt, and the desire to make all right and comfortable, we should get very little credit for anything we may hereafter have to say against him.

He could not tell them how he regretted his having been betrayed into a speech which had given pain. He solemnly assured them that it arose from a certain misunderstanding on his part, which he now clearly saw, and he wondered how he could have so far blundered. But the manly and spirited conduct of his young friend, Mr. Carlyon, must have raised him in the

estimation of them all, and he could not help adding—even though his doing so involved a little revelation on *his* part, for which Mr. Carlyon was doubtless not prepared,—that he had a right to regret an engagement which put an end to his hopes of calling that gentleman his brother-in-law."

Now, thought his Lordship, and with a sweet smile, let us see whether she has told him. But Carlyon's attention was turned upon Jane, who became very pale at Lord Rookbury's last words, and seemed to keep herself from fainting by a strong effort.

"Some water," he said, darting to the bell, and pulling violently. A moment or two, and he repeated his effort, but no servant appeared. Dusk was coming on.

"O, by George," said Henry Wilmslow, glad of an excuse for resuming peaceful relations, "you may pull the house down, but you will get no hearing. There's a fight out by Bogley Bottom, and one of the fellows is cousin to our servant girls. I'll lay my head the sluts have run off to know how the affair has gone. I should have gone myself but for his Lordship being here."

Lord Rookbury sprang up with a boy's agility.

"Bogley Bottom," he said, with something almost amounting to agitation. "I'll—no, no. Here, Carlyon. Come here, man," he said, stamping. "See to your wife, Wilmslow."

His gestures were so sudden and imperative, that Bernard felt they ought to be obeyed. He crossed the room to Lord Rookbury, who dragged him from it by the arm, and when in the passage, said a few hasty words, which instantly threw Carlyon into a still fiercer excitement. He broke from Lord Rookbury's hold and rushed to the stair-head.

"Stay, stay—one moment—you will save time by it! My horse, one in a million, is in the stable here. Take him, and ride him like——."

It was a strong comparison, no doubt, but Carlyon did not hear it—for, with a word of assent, he fled down the stairs, and in an incredibly short space of time Lord Rookbury heard the clatter of well-known hoofs, as a reckless horseman dashed away from Aspen Court.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE OWL HAD SET A TRAP.



NOTHING could be much simpler or more straightforward than the process by which the three young ladies of Aspen became the involuntary guests of the lord of Rookton Woods. As Mrs. Wilmslow has said, their papa, driving round to the door in a phaeton, lent him by the obliging Earl, invited them to take a long round with him, and, being dutiful daughters, Emma, Kate, and Amy were speedily hatted and jacketed, and packed into the carriage. The Ambassador, who had previously made himself acquainted with the road, drove straight for Rookton, and it did not occur to the girls, who had not previously been taken across the country, that they were at the door of Lord Rookbury's mansion, until the noble owner himself, who had been watching their progress round the curve of the road, (and, it may be added, denouncing Mr. Wilmslow as a snob for driving with a large and swaggering gesture, which the latter considered magnificently aristocratic,) came out to hand them from the vehicle. Then, as the truth flashed upon them, there they were, and what were they to do? If they or Mrs. Wilmslow had suspected the object of their journey, of course, despite their duty to their sire, they would have invoked the mild headaches, and slight faintnesses, and gentle shiverings, or some other of the serviceable little ailments which good fairies send to the help of good young people who are asked to go anywhere against their inclinations; but it was too late to think of this now. And as the Earl of Rookbury, with the most gentle and gentlemanly manner in the world, came out to welcome them, and thanked them for taking him by surprise (an old hypocrite!) and led them through his hall, just indicating his beautiful Canovas as things which he must show them when they came out, it was difficult for the girls to feel any prolonged embarrassment. Lord Rookbury had learned, ages before, the art of placing people at their ease when it suited him to do so, and it suited him just then, very particularly. They had their father with them, too, which was something after all, bad style of father as he was. If

they had noticed the intense contempt which, for one second, Lord Rookbury concentrated into a glance at Henry Wilmslow, as the latter, in his false and made voice, desired that the carriage might be brought round again in an hour, the poor girls might have had their filial instincts unpleasantly quickened.

For reasons of his own, I suppose, the Earl did not conduct his visitors through his house by the usual route, but ordering lunch, he led them in and out among the labyrinths of which mention was made a long time ago, and in each room he seemed rather bent upon directing their attention to some single object, than upon making them understand the plan of the mansion. Still, he did all with so little effort, that Emma and her sisters could hardly notice that they were rather hurried from point to point. They saw the gallery, and the library, and the conservatory ; and then lunch was announced, and the Earl took them upstairs by a flight of stone steps from the latter to the drawing-room floor, whence crossing two or three passages, they came to a charming circular room, furnished with great elegance, and lighted only from above. The Rookton Woods servants must have been quick as well as tasteful, the round table being beautifully set out with flowers, and silver, fruit, and cut glass,—the pleasantest mixture of colour and glitter.

"O, what a pretty room !" said Amy ; "I feel as if I was inside a kaleidoscope."

"Very well," said the Earl, smiling, "and we will turn the kaleidoscope for you." And placing his hand to the wall, a contrivance, which escaped the eye, apparently gave motion to some outside cylinder, the central portion of each of the brightly painted panels slid away, and rose-coloured glass took their place. The light was then the most charming that ever broke upon one in a dream of fairy-land,—or at the end of one of Mr. Planché's accredited revelations from those parts.

"Do you like that better ?" asked Lord Rookbury.

"No," said Kate, "but I should like to know how it is managed."

"I will show you presently," replied the Earl ; "but why do you not think it an improvement ?"

"I think the first arrangement was in much better taste," said Kate ; "besides, we lose the effect of those beautifully painted *walls, which I suppose are copies from Pompeii.*"

"They are," said the Earl, "and I see you are a critic of the first force, so we will leave things as they were." And again touching the machinery, the panels resumed their former position, and the soft light came down from above upon the exquisite combinations and colours of the old Pompeian artists, upon which it would be pleasant to discourse, but needless, as they are already reproduced among the choicest marvels of Sydenham Palace, Paxtonia.

"And now for lunch," said Lord Rookbury. "If I had known that your papa was going to be so very kind as to bring you to see me, we would have had all sorts of nice things, for my confectioner, M. Meringue, has his talents, and will break his heart at finding what a chance of appreciation he has missed; you must promise him another. Wilmslow, we are like John o'Groat here; there is no top or bottom to our table, but everybody is at the head. Amy, sit near me. Miss Wilmslow will perhaps take care of her papa, and the critic will cut up that *pâté* with her usual discrimination.

"I wish we had a round room at Aspen," said Amy. "I like round rooms because, you see, there are no corners for the ghosts to hide in."

"Don't talk such stuff," said her papa, angrily.

"Nay, nay," interposed the Earl, "I think she is perfectly right, and that it is a great advantage, and, if she likes, we will manage to build her a room at Aspen, one of these days, in the shape she prefers."

"It's very good of you to apologise for her, my Lord," said Mr. Wilmslow, "but it makes one sick to hear a girl talk such rubbish," he added, with a scowl at poor Amy.

"That's Chablis next you—drown your sensations," said the Earl, in a sneering voice. For to do him justice, he hated to hear any feminine thing spoken coarsely to—unless there were satisfactory reasons for it, in which case his Lordship would have abused any imaginable Ophelia as deliberately as does Hamlet himself.

The young ladies did some little justice to the Earl's arrangements, and Henry Wilmslow did a good deal, remarking that a spread like that did not come every blue moon, and Lord Rookbury left the room before his omnivorous guest had completed his refecton.

"In for a good thing, girls," said Wilmslow, with his mouth full, as the Earl closed the door. "Wouldn't you rather be here for a month than a week?"

"It is a long drive home, papa," said Emma, beginning to adjust herself for departure.

"Well, what then?" demanded her father.

"I suppose we had better go as soon as Lord Rookbury comes back," urged Emma.

"I suppose you will go just when I please, and not before," retorted Mr. Wilmslow.

"Only mamma will wonder what has become of us," suggested Kate, gently.

"Let her wonder," replied Henry Wilmslow, taking a large glass of wine. He seemed trying to work himself up into a passion in order to gain resolution. The girls continued their preparations, but still Lord Rookbury returned not. They looked at one another, and their father went on filling and emptying his glass. Half an hour passed and still no Earl.

"How very odd that he should stay away!" said Kate.

"Not odd at all," said Mr. Wilmslow. "What the devil do you mean by odd? A gentleman, and above all a nobleman, has a right to do as he likes in his own house, I should suppose, without being called to account. I am d—d if I ever heard a more insulting observation."

"I had no intention of being insulting, papa," said Kate, quietly.

"Don't tell a lie, for you had," said Wilmslow, savagely, but yet not caring to meet the child's eye. "Insulting Lord Rookbury, as my friend, and me also, and I'll be hanged if I stand it, either from you or anybody else. I know who has taught you to do it and set you against his Lordship, and I'll let her know I do before long; but as for you, just mind what you're after, that's all." And with a furious gesture, half his fury being sham, he gulped down another glass of wine, spilling some of it over his dress in the way, an accident which helped his temper to the desired pitch, especially as he detected a little smile on Amy's face. He demanded what she meant by sitting there grinning at him.

"Why, papa," said Amy, outspoken as usual, "you did look very funny with the wine running from both corners of your mouth."

"Come here, Miss," replied her father, doggedly. The wine, to which he was little accustomed, was working with his coarse nature, and the fictitious excitement was giving way to a real one.

Poor little Amy turned rather pale at the tone in which he spoke, but nevertheless sprang to his side with an alacrity which should have disarmed any irritation. He raised his hand, and in a moment would have struck her, when Kate suddenly said, laying her hand on his arm,

"Papa! Lord Rookbury is watching you."

The words checked him in an instant. He looked all round the room as he forced his inflamed features into a sort of smile with which to greet his patron. Lord Rookbury was not there. But following Kate's eye, Wilmslow saw that it was fixed upon a portion of the ornamental painting on the wall. He could see nothing else, but instantly gave the Earl credit for having some spy contrivance which Kate had detected. And the reader will probably be of the same opinion. Yet it happened that the case was not so—the idea had started to the poor girl's brain in the extremity of her terror lest her sister should be maltreated, and she hazarded it as a last chance. Lord Rookbury was a couple of miles from the house.

"Nonsense, child, nonsense," said Henry, "I'll go and see what the Earl is about." And he left the room, and (for we may as well dispose of him at once) went in search of his patron. After he had wandered about the house for some time, Jameson came to him with a message from Lord Rookbury, in obedience to which Mr. Wilmslow with much alacrity made *exit* from Rookton Woods without further leave-taking.

For some time after his departure Emma and Kate naturally occupied themselves with consoling their sister, and deploring the condition into which their respectable parent had brought himself. But as time wore on, and there were no signs of his return, or the Earl's, the young ladies began to grow uneasy, and at last agreed to send a servant to their papa. This was a sensible resolve, but not fated to be carried into effect, for all their researches could not detect a bell-handle in the circular room. But, they argued, there must be a bell somewhere in the house, and Kate undertook the discovery. Her travel was brief. The door of the room opened to her hand, but that of the passage

which led from the gallery to the apartment they occupied was fastened from without. They were prisoners.

Then they almost began to be frightened. Still, Kate and Emma had plenty of sense; and it speedily occurred to them, that their father, in going out, had secured the door by mistake, or in caprice, and must release them in due time. Amy, however, was by no means so easily calmed, and grew hysterical, and intimated her belief that they had been lured into a dreadful tower, and were to be starved to death, and stay there until they became *skeletons*. And the child dwelt upon the word, and repeated it in a way which had a painful significance for her sisters.

Kate grew indignant, and determined to clatter at the outside door until she attracted somebody's attention. But on trying it she found that she could make very little noise, the door being thickly padded, obviously that the chamber to which it led might be as quiet—even when the house should be full of visitors—as its wayward proprietor could desire. She gave up the idea in despair, and her next was to seek for the machinery by which the Earl had shown the rose-coloured windows.

"I know whereabouts the contrivance lies," she said, "for when Lord Rookbury touched it the second time, I laid my fork in the direction to which his hand went. Let me see—where was I sitting?"

And Kate proceeded to fix upon a spot in the wall where she was certain the handle, or spring, was placed. But all her researches failed to discover it.

"If you found it, dear, there would be no use," said Emma, "for I noticed that the windows did not open."

"They would break, I suppose," said the energetic second child of the house of Aspen. "However, if we cannot make ourselves heard, I suppose we can only wait in patience." And they did wait beguiling the time with conjectures, and with assurances to Amy that there was no possibility of their having been left there to perish. Perhaps papa had gone to sleep off the wine.

Evening, however, drew on, and the rays of the setting sun fell upon one side of the dome-light glass roof of the room. The girls became weary and silent, and poor Amy actually subsided into a *disquiet sleep*, ruffled by start and sob. Dusk approached,

—but just as the room was growing gloomy, a figure entered it. Kate sprang to her feet in an instant, but there was no great cause for alarm. Their visitor was an exceedingly respectable and respectful looking female servant, of a superior order, who begged to know whether she might attend the young ladies to their rooms.

“Our rooms!” said Kate, astonished. “Pray where is papa—Mr. Wilmslow? Will you please to ask him to come to us directly, or show us where he is?”

“He has gone out with my Lord, Miss, but his directions were that I was to attend you, and see that you had everything you wished for.”

“A strange time to go out, in the country,” said Kate. “Did you understand when he would return?”

“He did not say, Miss; but Jameson mentioned something about a late breakfast to-morrow, so he is probably coming over in the morning.”

“Leaving us here for the night,” exclaimed the two girls; and Amy, awakened by the voices, sat up, and gazed wildly about her.

“What *will* mamma think has become of us?” said Emma, piteously.

“Your mamma, Miss?” said the female, as if taking a cue.

“Mr. Wilmslow wrote her a letter, and it has gone off three hours ago by a messenger on horseback.”

“Oh, if she knows where we are,” said Emma, “a great weight is off my mind; but it is the strangest thing I ever heard of.”

Strange or not, it did not appear to the girls that they had any choice. Night was coming on, and they were sixteen miles from home. All that they could do was to follow their guide, who crossed the room, opened a door opposite to that of the entrance, and so constructed as to seem part of the wall and to elude observation. It opened into another short passage which led to two small but pretty apartments, in one of which was a single bed, muslined and fluted, and tricked out, rather after the fashion of a poetical upholsterer than an artist, and in the other, two, of similar dainty adornment. Candles were placed in each room, lighted, from which of course the young ladies knew that there must be another communication with the house, but they

could not see it. Their attendant, after making herself as useful as they seemed inclined to permit, informed them that her name was *Pearse*, and that she was ordered to be in constant waiting upon them, and withdrew into the circular apartment. Kate remembering the bell dilemma hastened after her, and to her exceeding surprise found the room illuminated with soft light sent from without through a rim of ground glass which ran round between the walls and the dome—and, to her still greater astonishment, that the table, with all its varied contents, had utterly vanished. She stood, for a moment, gazing at the changed aspect of the apartment, when light gushed up from the floor, and the table, rearranged with a perfect little dinner complete to the finger-glass, rose once more to its place. It had not of course, been intended that she should see this process. And, for some undefinable reason, it produced anything but a pleasant sensation in the girl's mind. She had heard of such contrivances, or at least read of them, but could not remember that such boards had ever been surrounded by the best class of company.

"One of Lord Rookbury's fancies, I suppose," she said, describing the incident to her sisters, "and he thinks it will amuse us."

"Perhaps our beds are on the same things," said Amy solemnly, "and at midnight we shall descend into some grim charnel-house and be left there for ever and ever."

"How *can* you talk such nonsense, darling?" said Emma. "You do not even know what a charnel-house is. I wonder where you caught hold of the word."

"Where did the Veiled Prophet take *Zelica* from the dance?" said Amy, shuddering. "Did not the dead people's eyes glare out——"

"Be quiet, Amy," said Kate, anxious to break off the train of ideas upon which the child had fastened, "and just snap my bracelet for me, dear, will you."

"Yes, said Amy, taking her sister's pretty arm between her own hands, and calmly adding, "A snake! Ah! we shall have plenty of snakes down there in the pit. How will they wind in and out among our bones!"

Emma's distressed look at hearing the child pursue this singular theme nearly set Kate off crying, but she controlled *her agitation*, and the three returned to the other room, where,

with the aid of another discovery they made, namely, a collection of books and portfolios, chosen as if for such visitors, the evening passed, though heavily, and Pearse reappearing, and having no tidings of Mr. Wilmslow beyond a decided assurance that he would not be seen that night, they retired early, and at Amy's express desire, to the same room, where Kate, as the most valiant of the party, occupied a solitary couch, Amy nestling to sleep in the arms of her elder sister.

How their mother passed the night need not be said.

The rain descended heavily the following morning, which, it will be remembered, was the day Carlyon left town, in obedience to Mrs. Wilmslow's summons. Pearse was duly in attendance, but there was no news of Mr. Wilmslow.

"But where is Lord Rookbury?" demanded Kate. "It is very singular that he has never been near us since he left the room yesterday. Is he in the house?"

"We never venture to know, Miss," was Pearse's reply. "If my Lord's bell rings, it is answered, and it has not rung to-day. The Lord help anybody who should go into his Lordship's room before it rings."

"Why, he's worse than Blue-beard," plumped out Amy.

"It is not for me to say so, Miss," replied Pearse; "but let anybody offend my Lord, and it'll be more by habgrab than good cunningness, if that party gets off easy."

The bit of *patois* occasioned some speculation, and after breakfast, Kate, who had been considering for some time, said to Emma—

"I shall trust to my habgrab, whatever that may be, and explore the house. We are certainly not going to be kept here any longer." And she rang the bell, Pearse having shown her its artful concealment—an ivory plate forming one of the Pompeian flowers on the wall. Pearse came, and Kate signified her wish to be conducted to the conservatory.

"Certainly, Miss," said Pearse, "I will get the key." And she left the room. An hour passed, and she did not return, nor were all the indignant girl's performances on the ivory plate of the least avail. And the outside door was, upon trial, found to be locked.

"This is very curious, Kate," said Emma. "It looks as if we really were prisoners."

"It is something more than curious," said Kate with a flashing eye. "It is an indignity. Ah! something occurs to me." And with a light and hasty foot she went back to the chamber in which they had slept. Nothing had been touched since they left the room.

"Emma," she said, returning, "we will not bear this. Perhaps mamma has never been informed where we are. Something in the way that woman spoke made me suspect her. It is now midday, and no news of papa. Let us leave the place." The young lady spoke in a low but determined voice.

"It is just what I should like to do," said Emma; "but how on earth to get out. It seems to me that we are guarded on every side."

"It is very shocking to have to try a trick," said Kate, "but there is no help for it, for here we will not stay. That servant will not come back, perhaps, until night, and then we are just where we were. It is all most strange, and I do think we ought not to submit. While papa was not quite himself, it might be forgiven, but now we *must* return home. The first thing is to get out of these rooms. Oh! if they were not all lighted from above. But I have a plan. You two stay here, and talk and laugh, for I have some notion that we may be listened to. Do not come to me on any account."

And she stole very quietly into the bedroom which they had not occupied, and concealed herself in a very artful manner, crouching between the gaily bedizened bed and the wall near which it stood. Her patience was rather severely tried, for an hour must have elapsed, and Kate still continued in her hiding-place, but at last she was rewarded. She distinctly heard the tread of some one in the adjoining bedroom, which the new arriver had evidently come to arrange.

"Then the door *is* in that room," said Kate, "and yet we could not find it. Now, if she sees me she will not go out, and if I require her to show me the door, we shall have a scene, and be defeated after all. Ah! here she comes. What a pretty girl!"

The pretty girl in question came stealthily into the room, glanced round it, but did not see Kate's bright eyes gleaming at her through the muslin. She tripped forward to the passage. *and silently drew a bolt*, thus, as she supposed, preventing the

young ladies from coming to their apartment. But pretty girls will be curious, and having drawn the bolt, the young house-maiden paused to listen to the conversation of the prisoners. Kate, in her concealment, instantly suspected that this was the case, and darted from her lair, and into the room in which they had slept, just in time to find a second hiding-place before the servant returned. The latter went rapidly through her work, and at last Kate Wilmslow had the gratification of seeing her open the door of the room. A large looking-glass was hung against it, in a way calculated to disarm suspicion that the outlet was there, and it swung into the apartment with the door, as the girl opened it. "But if she shuts it again," thought Kate, "and I do not know the secret."

Where she had crouched for the second time, her head was just within reach of one of the toilette tables. The girl's back was towards her, and, quick as the thought, Kate snatched a small china bottle from the table, and flung it with all her force into the adjoining room. It crashed against the wall, and fell. The pretty country girl brought out an unmistakeable oath, and rushed to see what had happened—another moment, and our light-limbed Kate was on the other side of the secret door. Without pausing to listen to the wonderment of the domestic as to whence in the name of All's Blazes the china could have fallen, Kate skimmed along the gallery, and taking the first inviting-looking door, found herself in the principal drawing-room of Rookton Woods. This, however, was not what she wanted, and after a rapid glance at the magnificently-furnished room, Kate turned to leave it. But, as she did so, there rose, over the back of a large lounging chair, the smallest and most fairy-like face she had ever seen, and a child's voice said—

"You just stop. You're the girl with the big eyes that's in love with St. Bernard."

CHAPTER XXIX.

A PET, AND HIS BACKERS.

THE command, and still more, the charge which followed, certainly brought up poor Kate in an instant, and the eyes to which the allusion had thus been made, opened widely enough to justify it. And then the speaker glided from the large chair and confronted the runaway. Heedful readers will, it is to be hoped, remember the fairy-like little girl who roused Mr. Carlyon from his slumbers in the library, and who now stood before Kate Wilmslow, costumed with less elaboration, but not with less care than when she presented herself to Bernard in all the miniature splendour of a full-dress toilette. She was in white, her high-made frock terminated at the neck by a delicate little frill, a blue girdle and ivory buckle at her tiny waist, and her fair hair secured by a long golden comb which went round the back of the head, and branched into ornament at the temples—it looked like an undress coronet. Unwelcome as was the apparition, Kate confessed to herself that she had never seen anything so charming.

"Well, child," proceeded the little lady, gazing up into Kate's face. "Are you looking for the parson?"

"Looking for whom, dear," said Kate Wilmslow, more astonished than before.

"The parson. Because he is not here, and I think that you might wait until he is sent to you. How you do stare! But papa was right, and you have beautiful eyes. I shall kiss them—sit down here." And rather imperatively pushing Kate to a couch, Lurline sprang upon it, lightly as a bird, and brought her lips to the eyes of her new acquaintance.

"And now," said Kate, smiling, "please to tell me who you are?"

"Me!" replied the child, "I am somebody—everybody—anybody. You may call me Lurline, or anything else you like. But what have you dared to come out of your room for?"

"And is it the custom in this house to lock ladies up in a particular room, and call it daring if they come out?"

"Ladies, no. But we locked up the bride and her bridesmaids until they were wanted, and I should very much like to hear how you escaped. I suppose you bribed one of the servants."

"Indeed I did not," said Kate, rather indignant than amused at the precocious worldliness of the suggestion.

"Then tell me how you managed," said Lurline, throwing her arms round Kate's neck, and laying her cheek against that of her companion. "Tell me, there's a dear, and I won't tell anybody. I swear I won't. There, I never break my word when I say that. Now."

"O, you shocking little thing!" said Kate, "Pray don't say such words. Do you think I would not believe you if you made a promise?"

"*Sacrebleu*, I do not know why you should," said Lurline. "Why should I keep a promise to you, who are one of my enemies?"

"I your enemy, dear child!" said Kate. "What nonsense has somebody been putting into your head?"

"O, is it nonsense?" retorted Lurline. "I know all about it, and if you think you can deceive me with your hypocrisy, you are very much mistaken, I can tell you. Do you see this ear?"

"Yes I do, and a very pretty little ear it is, with a very pretty earring in it."

"Ah! well. It may be a little ear, and I may be a little pitcher, but I can hear as well with it as if it was as big as Pearse's. So now you understand."

Lurline's mingled worldliness and childishness puzzled Kate, who could know nothing of the young lady's antecedents; but Kate had business of her own on hand, more immediately pressing than the solving the problem of this quaint little fairy's character. One thing was certain, namely, that her own escape having been discovered, and by such an observer, it was useless to think of further measures unless Lurline's co-operation could be secured, and this was the next thing to try for. And Kate's diplomacy was guided by an instinct which determined her to go straight to the affections of the little girl, if she had any.

"And so you have been told that I am your enemy, Lurline?" she said, kindly.

"Of course you are," replied Lurline, rubbing her fair soft cheek against Kate's with a caressing action curiously at variance with her words. "Not my worst enemy, because she is locked up, I suppose?"

"Do you mean one of my sisters?"

"You know very well that I do. Your eldest sister, who is going to be Countess of Rookbury. I hate her."

"And you hate me?"

"I hated you before you came in, and I shall hate you again as soon as you are gone, but do you know I don't hate you so much while I am talking to you."

"But I want you not to hate me at all, nor my sister, who is the best and kindest girl in the world, and would love you very much if you would let her, and so would I."

"Bless you," said Lurline, giving Kate a little pat on the cheek, "it's no go, dear, none whatsoever, as Pearse says. We are up to the move. Of course you will try to smooth me over, and pet me, and make much of me for a little while, and then—*crac*. We are prepared for all that, we flatter ourselves." And again she laid her face to Kate's.

"What *is* to be done with this perverted little being?" thought Kate.

"Lurline, dear, I won't pet you, I promise that. But tell me something. I suppose that if I and my sisters, whom you think your enemies, were turned out of this house, you would be very glad?"

"Well," said the child, thoughtfully, "it would be a good thing; but you would all come back again, so it would be no great good done, *ventrebleu*."

"No, that we *never* would," said Kate, very emphatically.

Lurline suddenly twisted her face into a singular expression of petulance, and sent out a sort of taunting sound.

"Nyeigh!" she said, or rather uttered. "I know all about it. There's a mamma in the case, and she doesn't like us, and would not honour us with the match if she could help it."

"It would be a happy thing for you, dear, if you had such a mamma," said Kate, earnestly.

"*Morbleu*, you've got tears in your eyes!" said Lurline, quickly. "I did not want to make you cry—there—there," and she kissed Kate with real feeling. "Never cry," she added,

desirous to give useful counsel to a weaker friend, "it shows folks where to hit another time. You should bite your tongue very hard, and then you can always keep back your tears."

"Lurline," said Kate, "we want to get away from Rookton Woods as soon as we can, and you may be quite sure we shall never come back. It was very wrong indeed to lock us up, but I have managed to get out, and I am determined to take away my sisters."

"That seems fair," said the child. "I think I will go and talk to—somebody."

"If you do," said Kate, who guessed in what quarter the poor child's guides, philosophers and friends dwelt, "there will be no chance for us, because orders have been given that we shall be kept here."

"Ah! I should rather think they had," said Lurline. "And upon your soul, now, you want to go?"

"I assure you that we do want to go. And though I do not know this house very well, I think I can manage, if you will not give the alarm."

"Crac," said Lurline, "it's settled. But I will do it all for you, every bit of it. I will get you off in style. There shall be no sneaking about it. I will do it." And she sprang from the couch to the floor. Kate caught her by the sash.

"Stay," said Kate. "As soon as Lord Rookbury knows that we are gone, he will be terribly angry."

"Yes," said Lurline, "there'll be battle and murder and all sorts of pleasant things. Lord Rookbury *can* turn the house out of windows when he likes—I *will* say that of him."

"Well," said Kate, "you shall have nothing to do with it. We want to go very much, but we will not get you into any trouble. You shall not be scolded by Lord Rookbury."

"And should you care whether I was scolded or not," demanded the child, "so that you got away?"

"To be sure we should, darling, very much," said Kate; "and we should be very unhappy to think that we had caused it. So you shall have nothing to do with our going."

"I do not believe you are my enemy, after all," said Lurline, throwing her arms around Kate's neck. "Your sister is, but you are not."

"If you saw my sister, dear, you would not say so."

"Oh, but I have seen her. I made Wilkins bring me into your bedroom last night when you were all asleep, and I saw you all. You slept by yourself, but the child was with Emma. I was disappointed, though, for I wanted to see your eyes, and I forgot that I could not see them when you were sleeping. Well, now, look here. You stay where you are." And she darted from the room.

Kate was in a sad state of suspense. She hardly knew whether she had gained her point or not. She had produced an impression, it was true, but the nature of Lurline had been so singularly cultivated that it was impossible to say not only how manifold a sower might be repaid for seed laid therein, but whether the grain would not change its character in the ground, and come up something else. And then, though the immediate business of escape was the subject in hand, the child's first words insisted on claiming their share of Kate's perturbed thoughts. What, had the secret she had hardly dared to breathe to herself been made the common talk of Rookton Woods, even in the servants' hall! Poor Kate was in an unenviable state of bewilderment, when Lurline's flying feet were heard, and the next moment she was in the room.

"I shall manage," she said. And she seized the bell-rope, and rung vehemently.

"We are ruined," thought Kate. "But I will not return to the other room."

A servant entered.

"Lord Rookbury desires that the Misses Wilmslow's carriage may be brought round immediately," said Lurline, with an air of unhesitating command. "Send Pearse here, and put lunch in the library. Can you drive?" she asked, turning to Kate as the servant moved away. "If you can, perhaps you will like to do so, but if not we will send somebody with you."

"Yes," said Kate, eagerly, "I can drive very well—a little—quite well enough."

"Your sweetheart, St. Bernard, taught you, I suppose," said the *enfant terrible*: but Pearse entering at the moment, Kate's blush passed unheeded.

"Pearse," said Lurline to that domestic, who looked perfectly terrified at seeing one of her charges out of the cage, "go to the Misses Wilmslow, and say, with his Lordship's kindest regards,

that he is very sorry a fit of the gout prevents his coming to bid them good-bye, and that their carriage is at the door ; and you show them down into the library. You come with me, Miss Catherine."

Pearse, accustomed to obey the orders of the little fairy, withdrew, and Lurline conducted Kate down stairs. It may be needless to say that Emma and Amy were soon with them, and that the lunch was scarcely tasted. Lurline did the honours with the utmost gravity, especially patronising little Amy, whom she encouraged very pointedly. The carriage was announced, and Lurline took a stately farewell of Emma, who wanted to kiss her, but from whom the child drew back, but embraced Kate with much warmth, and put a little packet into her hand, begging her to keep it and think of the giver. As for Amy, Lurline merely patted her on the shoulder with a matronly smile, and insisted on putting some cake into paper for her. They entered the carriage, and Lurline, on the steps of the portico, said, gravely,

"I hope that you will allow me to say to the Earl that you forgive him for not being down to see you off, because he really feels so hurt at it."

The permission was readily given, and they drove off, with hearts in a flutter. But Kate's self-possession came to her aid, and having, as usual, observed the road, she easily made it out again. They were soon far away from Rookton Woods.

We shall have to follow them ; but, as a trifling homage to the respected unities, let us here insert an observation or two, which one hour later the Earl of Rookbury made, when having awoke and dressed himself, and breakfasted, he went to the circular room, and found there, not the three young ladies from Aspen, but Pearse, who was arranging the apartment, and Lurline, who was reading an exceedingly fast Palais Royal vaudeville. Poor Pearse, whose terror, when she found that she had been mystified, was hideous rather than piteous, had evidently a belief, founded on a prevalent Gloucestershire story, that her mildest sentence would be that she be carted off to the nearest kennel, and flung to the raging fox-hounds, but she had still enough of woman in her to shudder for what might happen, when Lord Rookbury, having heard her stuttering story through, turned to Lurline, and looked at her hard for a minute or two.

"Well," said the Lord Temporal, "I was always of opinion that your mamma was the coolest—the most infernally deliberate liar in Europe, but it is a comfort to see that the rising generation is likely to equal the virtues of its predecessors—but," (he added, with a savage look and voice, under which even Lurline turned pale), "don't try these things too often in *my* house." He paused for a moment, as if to let the lesson sink in, and then said pleasantly, "Now, my dear child, don't let the day slip away without taking your ride! Pearse, you goose, order Mademoiselle Lurline's pony!"

The Earl and his child mounted, and she cantered by his side for some distance, when he sent her back with the groom. Then, striking across the country, he reached Aspen Court in time to be seated where Bernard Carlyon found him in company with Mr. Wilmslow. Not one word of what had happened that morning did Lord Rookbury see fit to reveal to his friend. It was his whim to wait, and see what happened. The young ladies had not arrived.

Nor, indeed was it exactly probable that they would speedily appear. The road from Rookton Woods to Aspen Court was sixteen miles, crow flight, and the single horse with the loan of which the Earl had chosen to oblige Wilmslow, soon discovered that his pretty driver was not one quite qualified to dictate his rate of going, and accordingly he took matters his own way. It was dusk when the girls, who were beginning to get uneasy at their prolonged journey, were about six miles from Aspen. At this point there was, as Kate remembered, a toll-bar; and, on approaching this, they were somewhat surprised to see the toll-house, a cottage of some size, full of lights, and to observe several groups of men lounging about the usually lonely spot. The fact was, a fight, of some local interest, had taken place in a field near the neighbourhood, where the Bogley Pet had been revenging a previous overthrow received at the fists of the Slogging Smasher, and, though fighting with more ferocity than science, had certainly done his work like a Briton and a bruiser. But he had lost the fight, for, after smashing the Smasher into the most unhandsome mass of livid and bleeding flesh that ever was sponged, or came staggering up to the last call, the Pet, exhausted by his own desperate efforts, slipped *on the crimsoned turf*, and his blow fell foul. In ecstasies, the

Smasher's partisans, from whom all hope had departed, claimed the umpire's inevitable decision, and carried off their own senseless, but victorious, ruffian. The keeper of the toll-bar had been much interested in the fight, having, unlawfully, sold a good deal of liquor to the congregation, and his house was just now occupied chiefly by friends of the Pet, who were excited and exasperated at the accident which had snatched the laurels from the bull head of their man.

Mustering all her courage, Kate Wilmslow drove slowly but steadily on, nor was any particular molestation offered to the party beyond a few of those choice cuttings from the garden of ribaldry, by strewing which in the way of their betters, the lower classes in England love to compensate themselves for their inferiority of position. But, unluckily, in her desire to extricate the carriage from the throng, poor Kate, unused to travelling, forgot the ceremony of payment at the toll-bar, and drove through it. The keeper, always surly, but now savage between liquor and the loss of some bets, was standing by his den, and no sooner did the phaeton pass, with intent, as he supposed, to defraud him of his dues, than he roared ferociously to those around to stop it. Too glad, of course, to annoy decent people, half a dozen fellows immediately clutched at the reins, with as many coarse shouts, the horse was nearly thrown upon its haunches, and the carriage forced athwart the road, before the frightened girls apprehended the nature of the crime they had committed. Up came the gate-keeper, and in an insolent tone demanded what they meant by trying to cheat the toll.

"We had no idea of cheating," said Kate, "but we forgot that there was anything to pay here."

"I dare say. Devilish likely," said the fellow, with a brutal laugh, echoed of course by others round him. "Well, are you going to pay at all, or block up the road all night?"

Emma and Kate put their hands to their pockets, and to their dismay discovered, which indeed, could they have recollected themselves, poor things, they would have known very well, namely, that they had no money whatever. Of course little Amy had none.

"Now then," said the man threateningly, "I want my money."

Kate's spirit broke out, and she explained firmly enough, that they had come out without money, that they were the daughters

of Mr. Wilmslow, of Aspen, and had come over from Lord Rookbury's, and that the toll should be sent down to him in the morning. The man replied with a jeering laugh,—

"Not to be done. Don't believe a blessed word of it. Tried to chouse me by driving through, and now trying to gammon me with a pack of lies. Come from Lord Rookbury's, eh? Likely three gals in a one oss phaeton, and no servant, comes from there. Nice Lord you come from, I don't think. What should you say, Sammy?"

The person addressed, a thickset debauched looking man, in a dirty white coat, responded promptly,—

"I think the best thing the young women can do, is to get out and come into your house, and then we can talk it over, with something hot."

There was an applauding shout among the fellows who had now collected round the vehicle, and one of them laid hold of Kate's arm, as if to take her from the phaeton.

"Dare to touch me," said Kate, extricating her arm, with a spirit, which, despite himself, daunted the man. But the gate-keeper was less penetrable.

"Fine airs, by—," he said, "but it won't carry off cheating. You've drove through my gate without paying, breaking the law, and I've nine minds to get some of these gentlemen to drive you all off to gaol."

"But is there nothing we could leave—some ornament—anything?" said Emma, in extreme terror. "My brooch—anything—"

Kate suddenly remembered the packet which Lurline had given her. She tore it open, and a pretty little diamond heart, of considerable value, glittered before the eyes of the men.

"Come," said a lean, shabby-looking person, with a keen dark eye, "that looks like business. I think if the young lady left that, you might let her go on."

But the toll-man was in a dogged and impracticable frame of mind, and retorted that he did not keep a pawnbroker's shop, and that he would have his money or nothing.

"I think I could venture to lend the lady the money on that affair," said the dark-eyed man, "which would make everything pleasant. Hand it over, my dear, and let's see if it's real—people are so apt to be took in, in this wicked world."

"O," sobbed Amy, "if Mr. Carlyon was here."

"Mr. Which, my dear?" said a big man close to the other side of the vehicle. He had his hands in his pockets, and had taken no part beyond looking on.

"I said Mr. Carlyon, Sir," said little Amy, polite amid her tears. "A friend of ours."

"Mr. Barnard is it?" said the man, eagerly, taking his hands out of his pockets.

"Bernard, Sir," said Amy, quite brightening up.

"All's one," said the other, running round and clearing his way to Kate's side with a promptitude his heavy figure scarcely promised. "Stow it all," he said peremptorily to the toll-keeper. "Hand that back," he added, laying large hold of the dark-eyed man, (who was slinking sway) and extorting the diamond heart from his dirty hand. "Keep your heart, Miss," he continued. "And here's the toll, Master Bowmudge; and now make way for the ladies, you coves ahead there."

"And suppose I don't choose to take it from you?" said Mr. Bowmudge, insolently, "What then?"

I am sorry to say that the terms in which the other described what Mr. Bowmudge would, if he adopted the alternative he suggested, be also compelled to take, render his rejoinder inadmissible, but it provoked the toll-keeper to such an extent that he swore furiously that the carriage should not go on. But the morale of his party had been materially diminished by the formidable accession of the big man to the opposition, and several voices told him, with curses, not to make a fool of himself, but to take the money. He was, however, just in that condition of dogged obstinacy which is so singularly unfavourable to the adoption of one's friends' judicious advice. He seized the reins, which all the others had abandoned.

"You are a werry sad ass, Bully Bowmudge," said the big man, almost compassionately, and with a single straightforward blow, delivered without an effort, he knocked Mr. Bowmudge away from the horse's head and ever so many yards from the spot. The other got up desperately savage, and actually began to strip for fight.

"Wouldn't be perlite, Bowmudge, till the ladies is gone," said their protector coolly, "nor werry much for your precious health afterwards."

A horse's hoofs were heard, and the next minute up came

Bernard Carlyon at a gallop. He made out the group round the carriage, at a glance, and scarcely drew rein until close at its side. A cry of delight from Emma and Amy, and a thankful look from Kate were his welcome. Before he could speak, the big man touched him, as if desirous to be recognised, and then turned away.

"You here, too?" said Bernard. "I should have been easier if I had known it. But why are you stopped?" he asked the girls. The affair was explained to him in a minute. He turned white with anger.

"Where is the fellow?" he said.

Bowmudge, not looking much the better for the staggering blow he had received, came up, incited by some of the crowd, who were just in the temper to enjoy a little more mischief.

"Now, then!" he said confronting Bernard, with a scowl.

"What's his name," said Carlyon. "Somebody read it me off the board there?"

"Benjamin Bowmudge is his name," said the big man, in a low voice.

"And what then?" demanded the individual spoken of.

"Who are *you*?" he added with an oath.

"A friend of Lord Rookbury's," said Bernard, "whose visitors you have brutally insulted. Lord Rookbury never forgives, nor do I. You shall go to the hulks, ruffian. Pay him the toll," he added, giving the big man money. "And now, Miss Wilmslow, suppose we drive on."

Kate touched the horse, and the carriage went forward, Carlyon riding at her right. But Bernard's threat had driven the man to whom it was addressed to the verge of frenzy. As he saw the carriage move away, he uttered a hoarse howl, and rushing before Carlyon's horse, again seized the rein of the other. He had better have left it alone, for the punishment he had previously received was a friend's push compared to the chastisement which now descended upon him. Swinging his hunting whip over his head, Carlyon brought the thong with a slash across the face of Bowmudge, who in the extremity of his pain let go the rein, the only thing Carlyon desired, for, pushing his horse forward, he effectually separated the carriage from the assailant, and, desiring Kate to drive on, he turned upon Bowmudge, and, keeping the horse prancing round him, he plied

his whip so mercilessly, and with such precision, that the ruffian's head and shoulders were speedily in scarcely better condition than those of the champions who had that day battered one another for his gain. Finishing with a tremendous downright cut, Bernard wheeled his horse, and hastened after the carriage.

"I have taken it out of somebody," he found time to say to himself, half scoffingly, "and he deserved all he got. But I think he would have got off easier, but for the scene at Aspen."

CHAPTER XXX.

A MANAGER AND HIS GOOSE.



THE young ladies of Aspen Court, once more at home, where, by the way, their reception by the Earl of Rookbury was so fatherly in its earnest anxiety and regret, that their indignation, poor things, had no chance whatever against his sympathy, Bernard, after a brief council with Mrs. Wilmslow, determined to return to town and concert some measures with Mr. Molesworth for the better securing the comfort of the poor mother. He scarcely took the pains to continue the pretext that he had expected to meet Molesworth at Aspen, and departed without troubling himself with any formal adieu to the master of the house.

Emma bade him good-bye with a frank expression of regret, and little Amy cried, and refused to be comforted by his promise to return. But Kate took a calm, and somewhat reserved farewell of him, for which coldness Amy, after he had gone, scolded her heartily, and Kate submitted to the reproof with a strange meekness, kissing the orator now and then, but making no defence.

Carlyon's first instinct, on reaching London, was to hurry to his chambers, in the expectation of finding some information as to Lilian's place of residence. But out of the array of letters ranged in triple file down his desk by his laundress's care, not one was from Miss Trevelyan. He hastened to St. Alban's Place, in the hope of learning from Heywood where Lilian was, but the priest had left town, and his return was uncertain. After

some meditation, Bernard began to grow indignant, and to ask himself questions, the perpetually recurring one being whether Lilian had any right to treat him in that manner. Brooding over his wrongs at that young lady's hand, he gradually worked himself up to write her a very reproachful letter full of hard things. But all the time he was inditing it, and pretending to himself that he should so like to see her read that part—and that—and that—I believe that he was deriving a cowardly pleasure from the recollection that as he did not know her address he could not send the letter, and that as it would be unfair to keep such a document by him, it must go into the fire—which it did. Love ought to be better friends with Time than he is, considering how much time is sacrificed to love.

So, Bernard could only wait and hope, in the meantime discussing the whole question with himself at all convenient and inconvenient periods of the twenty-four hours. Very early in the morning, and before he got up, he usually considered his case hopeless, and Lilian as lost to him ; but when he came out, especially if it were a bright clear day, and he could walk with a springing step and inhale fresh air, he used to make up his mind that though there were difficulties in the way of his love, he should conquer them. And in the evening, and in pleasant society, where everything around you looks so smooth and prosperous, he was convinced that all was actually right, that he should soon meet Lilian, and that a few words would place them on the old footing. For circumstances and weather have more to do with our convictions than strong-minded people will admit.

It will not surprise anybody who knows our friend Mr. Paul Chequerbent, still an involuntary guest of Mr. Aarons, to be told that just when he began to believe his affairs settled, and his release at hand, he was suddenly reminded of a rather large debt of old date, on which proceedings had been taken by the creditor, but which had gone to sleep, either from the goodnature of the claimant, or his despair of doing any good with Paul. Something like a hundred pounds was wanted. Kether looked in no way surprised, when Paul, with some humiliation, revealed the affair, but drily remarked that some people easily forgot such things : it all depended on habit.

As usual, Bernard was summoned.

"I should like, of course, to give you the money, old fellow," he said; "but I have not got it, and though I could borrow it, just now it would not suit me to be a borrower. So I tell you, frankly, that I must sacrifice your interest to my own."

"Quite right," said Mr. Kether, quietly.

"But," said Carlyon, "I must help you, and I'll tell you what I will do. Three or four years ago I wrote a play. I locked it up, for I did not think it good enough to send to a manager. But I have been into some theatres lately, and I am certain, that bad as it may be, it is a great deal better than anything they are doing now. I will offer it to Dilligroat, and the price shall furnish your extrication."

"Dilligroat will pay you honourably," said Kether, who, like all Hebrews, took a strong interest in theatrical matters, "but he will not pay you too much. If you don't succeed with him, try Phosphor, who will promise you a good price, and pay you if he can't help it. I will manage *him*."

The plan was agreed on, and Carlyon's play was sent in to Mr. Dilligroat. A week passed, and no acknowledgment of the work being received, Bernard went to the theatre to obtain an interview. He was duly glanced at by the porter, and as duly informed that Mr. Dilligroat was not there, and that it was quite uncertain when he would be "down," perhaps not till night; perhaps not at all. This formulary (for the delivery of which Carlyon waited with grave patience) having been gone through, he went very close to the official, and allowed him to see the glimmer of half-a-crown. The man took not the slightest apparent notice of this gesture, but added to his previous communication that if Bernard had any message to leave for Mr. Dilligroat, he would, perhaps, like to write it down. This second formulary withdrew Carlyon from a group of two or three pale, damp-looking girls, hoping for an engagement in the ballet or chorus, an eager-eyed gentleman, to whom an order had been promised (and who could not understand how his friend, Mr. Dilligroat, had omitted to leave it, as he had to go over to Clapham with it, before half-past four, to his brother-in-law, information of such deep interest to the porter, that it actually made him whistle with excitement); a couple of carpenters, in shirt-sleeves and cloth-caps; and a beer-boy, who was incessantly bringing in as many pewter vessels as he could carry, for

the painting-room, and other private departments of the establishment. Carlyon was introduced into a tiny square closet, glazed in front, where the porter accepted his fee, and the visitor's card, which he read with great care, and despatched into the house by the first messenger who passed inwards. The official scarcely thought it worth while to reconcile this proceeding with his previous declaration, but murmured something about Mr. Dilligroat's "sometimes coming in at the front," and added a contemptuous reference to "those people bothering there." By long experience, the janitor had a tolerable guess at the character of the applicants for admission, and Carlyon looked like neither actor wanting an engagement, hanger-on wanting an order, tradesman wanting money, or bailiff wanting Mr. Dilligroat, four classes of visitants especially obnoxious to the latter.

In a few minutes a rather well-dressed, keen-eyed person, of good address, came out and hastily examined Carlyon. The appearance of the latter seemed to satisfy the inspecting commissioner, who made a sharp, decisive sign to him to enter, a result which caused the poor girls, and the order-hunter from Clapham, to look round with as much reproachfulness as they dared exhibit, and which brought another hurricane of whistling from the loyal and imperturbable Cerberus, while Carlyon was hurried along certain dark passages, and introduced to the manager's room. The occasional groan of a fiddle, and a clatter of hammers, were all the sounds he had leisure to note in his progress.

Mr. Dilligroat was a tall and well-built man, who was now becoming too large for the stage, but whose strongly marked features must have possessed considerable vulgar beauty some years before. They were, indeed, still pointed out as models, as were his broad shoulders and massy legs, by the female population of the retail trading district around his theatre, when a special "benefit," or some managerial whim brought the stalwart director forward for that night only. He was not a bad-hearted, nor even a bad-tempered man ; but a manager's hand must be against the majority of his fellow-creatures.

"How do you do, Mr. Carlyon? Glad to make your acquaintance, and hope we shall see a good deal of one another. Sit down. I shan't introduce you to this man, because he is one of the greatest rascals that ever lived, and who is now adding to

the vast and accumulated mountain of his iniquities, by asking me six and sixpence for a beast of a goose."

The person whose private character and precise business were thus unfolded by the manager's eloquent frankness, was a dirty-looking little man, nursing a large, plucked goose, which lay upon a red pocket-handkerchief. He seemed very little afflicted at this exposition of his nature, but with humble and smiling face turned to its author.

"Don't be hard upon me, Mr. Dilligroat, Sir. It's worth every penny of the money. I'll appeal to this gent," and he held up his goose to Carlyon, tenderly withdrawing the corners of the handkerchief as a proud young mother exhibits her first baby.

"That gent, as you profanely term him, you old Scabstraw, will shortly be one of our most distinguished dramatic authors. Don't poke your d—d bird in his face."

"Begging your pardon, Mr. Dilligroat, Sir, but if I might be so bold," said Scabstraw, with the most abject servility.

"But you mightn't. What is it, you old thief?"

"I've heard say a dramatic author should know what 'goose' is, begging both your pardons, gents."

"Are you sufficiently acquainted with theatrical slang, Mr. Carlyon, to know that by 'goose' that wretched old ribald means hissing? I trust this is the only intimacy you will ever have with the article."

"I trust so," said Carlyon, laughing, "but that is a sound seldom heard where you preside, Mr. Dilligroat."

"Not often, I am happy to say," said the manager, "thanks to the gentlemen who furnish me with dramas. But one is never sure, and the public's a rum beggar, a very rum beggar, Mr. Carlyon."

"But only feel him, Mr. Dilligroat," broke in the poor goose-broker, or rather goose-jobber;—for there was a complication of proprietorships in the animal, including the rights of a secretary of a goose-club, the landlord of a public-house where the club met, Scabstraw's own landlord (to whom rent was owing) and one of the scene-shifters, who had lent Scabstraw a shilling for the raffie at which the goose was won. A reference to a Master in Chancery could hardly have ascertained the respective liens and qualities of ownership in that bird.

"Feel the public, you ancient miscreant? O, feel the goose,"

said Mr. Dilligroat. "No, Scrabstraw, we'll bring this negotiation to a crisis. A crown—or cut."

Tears sprang to the eyes of Mr. Scrabstraw.

"Only feel him," he sobbed.

"If I do, it will be to knock off sixpence," said the stony-hearted manager. Scrabstraw dried his eyes upon the disengaged portion of his red handkerchief. At this moment a knock was heard.

"Come in, O come in!" said the manager in despairing fierceness at what he swore was the two hundredth application at his door. "O, you, Snunk; well, what is it?"

Mr. Snunk, the treasurer, whispered his employer.

"Of course, I shall," said Mr. Dilligroat, emphatically. "Most assuredly. I said so at rehearsal; and when I promise to take money, I always keep my word honourably. Knock it off every one of them. Mr. Snunk, Mr. Carlyon, our treasurer. Yes, Snunk, off with it. There are twelve young ladies in the ballet, and not one was here on Tuesday until eight minutes past ten in the morning. They talked about a sudden soaking rain coming on, and their light dresses, and being only a few minutes after time—all very fine, but it's the system, the system. I was here at ten, and surely my ballet ladies can be. They had not to wait for their carriage, as I had. So knock off sixpence from each of them when they come for their eleven shillings on Saturday, and I'll be bound they'll be here to time next call."

Mr. Snunk disappeared to deprive the girls, who had fancied, once, that life on the stage was easier than life in the kitchen, of the price of one day's dinner. The manager called after him.

"Don't let them send up anybody to me, Snunk. Say I am engaged with two gentlemen and a goose."

"Only feel him," resumed Scrabstraw, on this cue.

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody good," said the manager, "and you, Scrabstraw, if you know any prayers and thanksgivings, go home and say them in return for the rain that made my ballet ladies stand up, and get wet through ten minutes later than they ought. You demand six-and-sixpence for that skinny, old, tough, ugly, lean, hard, good-for-nothing bird. Well, you won't have it. But I have just fined twelve ladies *sixpence each*. Twelve sixpences is six shillings, which I have

thus saved. That I will give you for your goose. Take it and be gone, or be gone without taking it. Your answer, slave?"

"Here it is, then, Mr. Dilligroat, Sir," said Scrabstraw, assured that he should get no better terms.

"And there is your money. Don't say I never gave you anything. What are you doing, man? Let the handkerchief alone. That's mine."

"The handkerchief, do you want that?" supplicated Scrabstraw. "You would never go to use such a handkerchief as that."

"You leave it alone, I tell you. I may not use it in the light of a handkerchief, I grant you, but I may as a banner, or as a comic tie, or a duster, or fifty things. Any how, it's mine; and now, you old avaricious, hard-dealing ragamuffin, get out, laden with the spoils of your infamy."

And the goose-jobber departed, to make up his mystifying finance-sheet, which was somewhat simplified by the scene-shifter, who was lying in wait for him outside the door, and who, by menacing eloquence, obtained instant reimbursement of his venture, and usurious beer besides.

"It's a good goose, Mr. Carlyon, and as I may say, got for nothing," said the manager, smiling.

"But of course you will cook it in the theatre, and then send it into the green-room for those poor girls' supper," said Carlyon, rather mischievously.

"I would, with pleasure, Mr. Carlyon," said Mr. Dilligroat, desperately suppressing a laugh, and his black eyes shining with fun, "but the lesson would be lost, you see. I am a sort of father to these girls, and it is my duty to be strict with them. And now to business. I have read your comedy—where is it? here it is. No, that's not it, that's a piece by a new man; very clever, very smart, and exposing the vices of the aristocracy, who, between ourselves, are a very vicious lot—I see a good deal of them behind my scenes, you know. But we can't do his piece, impossible, quite. Attacks them for patronising the very things that bring our half-price—you comprehend. But it's a sad pity, for the piece is very smart, and very original. Being a new man, he writes a little raw, but it's in the right spirit."

"You like the French style of piece?" Carlyon said.

"No; at least I don't care what a piece is, provided it has situations. Those are the things. It goes against the temper

of you literary gentlemen to know that the pieces which really develop the powers of the actors, send the audience into screams of laughter, and bring in the money—are not the work of your fastidious, thoughtful men, who think and construct, and study, and re-write, and all that. No, Sir, the pieces that do good to the house are chiefly vamped up from old French farces, by the aid of a dictionary, by people who take a business view of matters, do as they are bid, and hack and slice their work to order, until it suits me and my actors, and then take their money. You gentlemen, until you are well broken, write plays to bring out *yourselves* and your own ideas—not to help the actors and please the audience. Do you know that, Mr. Carlyon?"

"I am here to learn," said Carlyon, quietly.

"Well, Sir," said the manager, "I think you will understand the principle on which I must sit in judgment on your play."

"Which implies," said Carlyon, "that judgment means condemnation?"

"By no means," said Mr. Dilligroat, "for your piece is full of good things, but it is not so good—or rather, so suitable to my purpose—as to justify me in incurring the expense which producing it properly would require, when I can, at a far less cost, get out something that would pay me better. I am very candid with you, for, though I defend myself against locusts, I am always straightforward with a gentleman."

Authors are—it is very sad that they should be so inferior to the rest of the world—but they *are*—sometimes vain of what they have done. Carlyon, despite his philosophy, was annoyed, and did not even inquire what Dilligroat meant by locusts. It was, however, that individual's mode of describing his tradespeople, and any others to whom he owed money.

"Don't be annoyed," said Mr. Dilligroat, "though I know it is annoying. I was annoyed myself when the papers said I could not play Hamlet, though, by the way, they know nothing about it, because I can. But I preferred rejecting your play at once to telling you I had not had time to read it, or that I had only read it in part, or suggesting alterations, merely to get you out of the way while you were making them, but not meaning to use the piece at all. That's the principle in which one deals with tradespeople," said the manager, "but I never treat a *gentleman so.*"

"I thank you for your straightforwardness," said Bernard, immediately recovering his temper. "I really thank you, Mr. Dilligroat, and though it would be idle to say that I am not sorry you do not accept the play, I am glad to have made your acquaintance."

"And I am rejoiced to have formed yours," said the manager, scorning to be outdone in courtesy. "There is your play, carefully enveloped, and nothing will give me more pleasure than to see it announced at another house. Meantime, though we do not yet meet as author and manager, I hope we shall; and if you wish to come and see us at any time, write to me for admissions, which I shall be too happy to give you. There is your play, with which, I assure you, I part with no small reluctance."

Not with more than Bernard felt at receiving it; but, perhaps, Carlyon's reluctance might be based upon the surer ground, inasmuch as he was intimately acquainted with every scene, passage, and word in the play; whereas, Mr. Dilligroat had not read one single line in it.

It was not that manager's custom to read plays. He employed certain authors in the way he had described, and their pieces he put upon the stage, and "made" them there, with the help of the actors, and the prompter's thick pencil. All others were looked at by a lady who would have been Mrs. Dilligroat, if her own husband, and Mr. Dilligroat's own wife had been dead, and then Mr. Dilligroat had married her.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MORE OF THE MIRROR OF NATURE.

THE same day, Carlyon, re-enveloping his play, addressed it to another manager, and before he was dressed the following morning, he was summoned to Mr. Phosphor's theatre, by the kind of message with which one's brother, *in articulo*, might be expected to send for you, so urgent and so affectionate was it. But it was Mr. Phosphor's way to be in a hurry, especially when anybody asked him for money.

The Dilligroat and the Phosphor establishments were, Bernard found, conducted in a very opposite style. At the latter all was

done with an affectation of quiet, mystery, and precision. Messages were conveyed in a gently confidential voice. The passages were thickly carpeted, the doors were doubled, and the bells were dumb. In the manager's own room, all was most exact order. Not a letter, not even an envelope, lay where it could by chance be taken up by mistake, or distract the eye from its immediate business. Pigeon-holes, garnished with ivory initials, contained a few carefully folded and endorsed documents. The play-bills of all rival establishments, vellum-bound, were within reach of the hand—those of the current season neatly filed, lying upon a side table. Every requisite for letter-writing was close—never was a masculine desk so multifariously supplied—and an ebony edged slit in the wall received all letters into a pipe, at the other end of which, in a room below, sat a messenger, whose sole duty was the instant despatch of the descending missive. Beneath the manager's foot was a sort of pedal, which, touched, sounded a distant bell, and instantly brought in a footman, hat in hand, ready for departure.

In ordinary conversation Mr. Phosphor affected extreme courtliness. He was perpetually acting, but nobody who had seen him upon the stage would have complained of a practice which gave him, when there, an easy refinement, painfully contrasting with the swagger of his rivals. Life was with Phosphor one long rehearsal. And he never missed it. Even at church, which he regularly attended, his performance was superb. Such hopeless contrition during the confession, such grateful joy at the absolution, such pious exultation at the psalm, such meek thankfulness that the kind gentleman in the pulpit should take the trouble to give him all that beautiful information in the sermon, were never witnessed within consecrated walls, where good acting has been seen, too, in its time. A deaf man might have written out the rubric from Phosphor's devotional pantomime. It would be unjust to call such outward and visible manifestations by so harsh a term as hypocrisy, for Phosphor was strangely impressionable, and was firmly persuaded of his being the character he assumed. It was easy to laugh at that weakness of organization, but by no means so easy to display the strength of personation to which it conduced. Phosphor was a man of decided genius, and not the less so that hard, *prudent actors*, who invested money in the funds, and always

acted as if they were thinking of it, pronounced him to be a leetle—what should they say?—and then they touched their foreheads, and misquoted Shakspeare on madness.

As Carlyon entered, Mr. Phosphor deposited a note in his private post-office, and welcomed him with a noble bow. But from the bow he instantly passed into poetry, which he spoke well, and therefore liked to speak. Handing Bernard a chair, he exclaimed :—

“ For thee, young warrior, welcome ! Thou hast yet
Some tasks to learn, some frailties to forget.”

“ And which,” asked Bernard, laughing, “ shall I begin with ? or shall I first say that I am much obliged by your very prompt attention to my note ? ”

“ My dear Sir,” said the manager with extreme suavity, “ an experienced jeweller instantly detects a diamond ; it is only over rubbish that he lingers with tests : the third page of your play settled its fate with me. I give you my honour I have not read a word beyond. I expect the copyist with the parts directly. He ought to have been here an hour ago, but he’s always got an attack of rheumatism, or his wife is just confined, or his house is burned down, or some ridiculous excuse, whenever he is told to make a little haste. But the piece is accepted, and, supposing we do not quarrel on terms, shall be read in the green-room to-morrow.”

“ I should have been even more gratified than I am,” said Carlyon (and he was very much gratified, a young author only knows how much), “ could I have heard your opinion on the whole piece. I hope you will see no reason to alter your judgment.”

“ I never alter my judgment,” said Mr. Phosphor. “ Right or wrong, I invariably adhere to it. That is the only way in a theatre. It saves worlds of time. I always request that everybody will write to me : this relieves their mind, and I usually put their letters into the fire, unread : that relieves mine. But I never alter anything except a drama, and that I know an author’s good sense will not object to.”

This hint was not altogether thrown away upon Carlyon, but he did not then understand its full meaning.

“ Your experience, of course,” he said, “ must render valuable

assistance to an inexperienced writer for the stage. You spoke of terms ; will you consider the piece yours at the price you are in the habit of giving for such dramas ?”

“Very well,” said Mr. Phosphor, gravely, “so be it, and that is off my mind. And now for the cast, there is a list of the characters. Had you any of our company in your eye, Mr. Carlyon ? Or will you leave the cast to me ?”

“We could go through it together, perhaps,” suggested the author.

“Just so, just so, and we’ll do it at once. The first is *Lord St. Rollox*. What sort of a part is that ?”

“He opens the play, you know,” said Carlyon, remembering that the manager had admitted having read three pages.

“True—true—but—let’s see—an old nobleman—heavy and virtuous, isn’t he, with an only child, whose sainted mother has left him a miniature, and a lock of fair hair that he kisses—isn’t that it ?”

“No,” said Carlyon, puzzling to recollect whether he had written anything at all like that.

“Ah ! no—no—I was confusing your play with another. But *Lord St. Hoxton*—what is it ?—*St. Rollox* is an old nobleman, surely.”

“*A ci-devant jeune homme*—I believe that’s the shortest way of describing him,” said Carlyon. “Very much made up—dyed hair—padded—and so on.”

“Well, we’ll make him an old man, and then Wigsby shall play him—clever man Wigsby, if he could only learn his parts, or understand them when he has learned them, but a respectable man, and grows ranunculuses. Who’s next ?”

“But,” said Carlyon, “it will not do to make *Lord St. Rollox* an old man. He makes love to *Aurora*.”

“What of that ? Why, it helps the piece—makes it all the funnier that an old man should be the lover. You’ll see how Wigsby will make it come out—nankeen trowsers and a buff waistcoat—”

“The deuce,” said Carlyon, “he’s a leading member of a first-rate club.”

“Call it the Oriental—that will explain the costume, and he can say he has come home from Gungamustabad, or somewhere, and that the name of *Aurora* is dear to him from having seen

the Aurora Borealis on his passage—but you've already put that joke in, of course. The next is the *Honourable Alaric Foambell*, his nephew—is that a hit at Mr. —?”

“Certainly not,” said Carlyon. “What possible excuse could there be for a personality like that?”

“Oh! I don't know anything about it, only I thought from the similarity of name—and all you author gentlemen like to walk into one another.”

“The idea never entered my head,” said Bernard. This was, of course, the truth, but, somehow, the manager did not seem quite to believe him.

“*Foambell*—has he much to do?” asked Mr. Phosphor.

“The lover of *Aurora*,” said Bernard. “Not a great deal, but he must look and speak like a gentleman.”

“Very easy to say,” said Phosphor, “but where will you find such a person? It's a good walking gentleman's part, and the only men who can say your words, as you would like them said, won't play walking gentlemen, confound them.”

“In Paris,” said Carlyon, “the walking gentlemen are exceedingly good actors, and know that they are very important objects in the picture.”

“In Paris,” said the manager, “the theatre is a school for the artist. We're above such pedantry. It's of no use talking about that. I suppose young Barling had better be *Alaric*.”

“Why, he is bow-legged,” said Carlyon. “A nice lover for *Aurora Trevor*.”

“He can't help his legs, you know,” said Mr. Phosphor, gravely, “and he will speak your words very tolerably, if you drill him well.”

“But the girl will be laughed at, when she speaks of his figure and graceful appearance.”

“Well, a comedy is made to be laughed at, isn't it?” asked the manager. “The next is ‘*Mr. Gibber, M.P. for Tipplingbury*,’ broad fun, of course. That we must try and get little Grig to play.”

“Grig! No, no,” said Carlyon, “Grig's a capital actor, but this is quite out of his way. This is dry sarcasm and ill-nature, strong ill-nature. Grig is one lump of self-enjoying good-humour.”

“But his name strengthens a bill immensely, and you must

tell him to be ill-natured—I don't know how he's to manage it, unless you bring him a new story every day about a horse having been cruelly treated, or a cat stoned to death—nothing ever makes him angry except the ill-treatment of an animal. We had once a goat in a piece here, and the creature would not go through a window at rehearsal. The owner hit it on the leg with an iron rod, the goat cried out with the pain, and the next minute Grig, who, small as he is, is all muscle, pitched the man across the orchestra into the pit. We must have a goat, and torment it in Grig's dressing-room, during the run of your play. Yes, yes, Grig must play *Gibber*, if he will. Let me see—the other men are small—'a Steward of a fashionable club'—that will do for old Danby, he formerly kept a public-house in Ratcliffe Highway, so he'll understand the part—'Pitch, a pianoforte tuner'—has he much to do?"

"Chiefly to convey a clandestine correspondence," said Carlyon, "one of the great uses of pianoforte-tuners, I believe."

"But he goes to the pianoforte, and the house will expect music—write a song for him, and we'll make old Jinkles set it. 'Footman,' 'Waiter,' anybody. Now for the women."

"Stay," said Bernard, "you have omitted a very important part, *Sir Malachite Fang*."

"That is a *very* important part, is it? asked the manager, in a low voice.

"The best part in the play," said Carlyon; "the character upon whose manœuvres everything turns."

"A gambler, a duellist, a libertine: with, I think, a dash of forgery, and a hint at something worse," said Mr. Phosphor, "but a delightful and fascinating fellow, who dresses to perfection, and has a caressing manner with everybody."

"You seem to have looked at *that* part, at any rate," said the author, laughing.

"Would you—entrust that part to—to *my* care, my dear Sir?" said the manager, in a mysterious whisper, and bending down to Carlyon as if he were asking the greatest and most unheard-of favour.

"No man in the world could play it so well," said Carlyon, astonished at this deferential tone.

"Then, with your permission, I will endeavour to do what *little I can* with it. You will perhaps add to your kindness," he

proceeded in the same manner, "and promise not to be irritated, should I, here and there, ask your leave in the course of rehearsal to substitute one word for another, or even to withdraw an occasional line. Long acquaintance with an audience sometimes enables me thus to bring an author's meaning more vividly forward."

"Pray use your discretion, Mr. Phosphor," said Bernard, "I am sure it will be exercised for the benefit of the piece."

"I trust so," said the manager; "but, as regards my own parts, I am rigidly scrupulous to adhere to my author's text, unless I have his permission to vary it. The thoughtful results of the patient leisure of a scholar are not to be hastily tampered with."

This sounded so proper, that Carlyon, half forgetting what had already been done, was enchanted, and he felt disposed to compliment Mr. Phosphor upon his gentlemanly treatment of the subject. However, he compressed his approbation into a bow.

"And now, as I said, for the women," said Phosphor, recovering his business manner. "You have four, I see. That's right. Petticoats lighten the stage very materially. Always get them on when you can. *Lady St. Rollox*—an old woman, I suppose?"

"On the contrary, the young wife of an old man."

"Ah! of course—I run away with her—we must consider, for, as her best scene is with me, I must have somebody who will feed me a little: Anna Ford?"

"She is very pretty, but so affected."

"No, no—she is not very pretty, but she is not at all affected. It's manner—nothing else; all assumed."

"An assumed manner is affectation, is it not?" said Bernard, laughing; "and Miss Ford seems to me to have a large development of the attribute. But she will do, I suppose; that is, if she will take a hint when I give her one."

"She will take anything you like to give her, Sir, from a hint to a bracelet, but either will be thrown away. Her head has no room for intellect, nor her heart for gratitude—but she draws the half-price by lowlier gifts, especially when those gifts are made manifest in flesh-coloured silk."

A gentle knock was heard, and a servant crept noiselessly to his master's side, and whispered.

"When I ring," said Mr. Phosphor, mysteriously, waving his hand as if to clear the room of the intruder.

"The next lady is Mrs. — what is it? *Mrs. Boomerang?* What's she?"

"An elderly she-Marplot. Her *spécialité*, as her name half implies, is her always coming back again when she isn't wanted."

"Old mother Boddle will do for her. Then there's *Miss Honora M'Cateran*—Scotch or Irish?"

"Both, and a romp."

"Miss Flabbington, then—both her Irish brogue and her Scotch accent are very bad, but she is deuced impudent, and the house likes her. And now," said the manager, pressing the pedal at his feet, "that is all."

"But *Aurora*," said Carlyon. "Where is our *Aurora*?"

"There," said the manager, pressing the knob at his feet, and pointing at the door, which at that moment admitted Angela Livingstone.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE READING IN THE GREEN-ROOM.



THE day of reading was appointed, and it may be believed that the young author was first at the theatre, distancing Mr. Phosphor and all the performers. But they gathered by degrees, and Bernard privately confessed to a sort of mortification of his literary vanity, when he found that the little groups into which the corps clustered, while awaiting upon the stage the summons to the Green-room, were not occupied in discussing the probable merits or authorship of the new drama, but upon such topics as interest other people than actors. Mr. Wigsby was full of talk about his flowers, especially some favourite roots which he was always digging up and wrapping in the blankets of his bed, to Mrs. Wigsby's great discouragement. Miss Flabbington had a tale about a cab-driver, who overcharged her eightpence to Chelsea, and Mrs. Boddle, who was understood to display some little occasional want of self-restraint in the social circle, delivered a curious detail of certain remarkable remedies she employed for the lumbago, to which a habit she had of sitting on the stairs, when convivial, rendered *her subject*. And the benevolent Grig, the Animal's Friend,

came late, but in high glee, having sent an unlucky drover to the treadmill for twisting a calf's tail to make it descend from a terrified old lady's Bath chair.

There was, however, a general impression among the actors, that Carlyon, whose name Mr. Phosphor had casually mentioned to one or two of them, was a non-existent person, and that the astute manager, or, as they termed him, "dodgery Foss," had fixed the name upon some nobody, for purposes to be afterwards made manifest. He had been convicted on previous occasions of having announced unlucky pieces as by persons who had never been heard of before, or afterwards; but if the dramas proved successful, Mr. Phosphor, questioned as to the authorship, would put on a look of imitation-modesty, which implied that "alone he did it." If the play failed, he never looked in this way, but had a fiction at hand about the author's being detained with a broken leg at Shrewsbury.

But the summons came, the performers took their stations in the Green-room, around the manager's table, Mr. Wigsby getting behind Mr. Phosphor, in order at convenient intervals, to make faces at Miss Ford, and cause that lady to laugh in the wrong place. Mr. Phosphor presented Mr. Carlyon to the circle as the author of the new play, and Mr. Grig, with great respect, begged leave to touch that young gentleman, which having done, Grig solemnly assured the other actors that it was "all right." This joke Bernard did not understand, but Phosphor, who did perfectly, grinned a remarkable smile, between amusement and rage.

Mr. Phosphor having again offered Carlyon the reading of his play, which Bernard declined, commenced by naming the characters. This done, Mr. Grig rose, and, with the utmost gravity, begged to say one word. He was grieved to have to do so, but every one would see that he did it more in sorrow than in anger—much more. He said that it was so desirable, for the sake of an author of a drama, and of the profession, that a performer should pay every possible attention to the structure and dialogue of a piece, in order to comprehend its bearing, and to acquire a due perception of its meaning, that he would express a most fervent, but most umble hope, that Mrs. Boddle might be cautioned to leave off thinking of that

Spanish onion in her bedroom cupboard, and to listen to what was going to be read.

"How can you be such a fool, Grig?" said Phosphor, indignantly, as everybody burst into a laugh.

"I've done my umble duty to the theatre," said Mr. Grig. "Go on."

The play was read, and the frequency of the smart and brilliant repartees, and a certain freshness of tone and treatment, pleased the audience, and a series of approving murmurs came, very agreeably, upon Carlyon's ear. A general clapping of hands greeted the close, and Bernard, although he had not spoken a word, felt as if he were out of breath.

"Very nice indeed," said Grig, "very nice."

"Very smart," said Wigsby. "One or two things that we have heard before, but gentlemen who read much can't help that. The joke about the doeskin glove is in the *Forged Turnpike Ticket*."

"I never heard of that piece," said Carlyon.

"No, it was never played in London," said Wigsby, "but anybody who knew the Norwich circuit will remember it, eh, Grig?"

"Rather," said Grig.

"We'll strike it out, of course," said Carlyon.

"We'll do no such thing," said Grig, "if you please. I shall give it as bold as brass; the public has not been the Norwich circuit."

"The situation in the greenhouse you borrowed from poor Charley Williams's farce—*Where's my Horseradish*? of course," said Mrs. Boddle.

"I think not," said Carlyon, smiling. "This is the first time I ever heard either of the author or the farce."

"Ah! perhaps you've seen it under another name," replied the lady. "It was played in the country, and the title changed according to the locality. It was called *Where's my Norfolk Biffin*? in one place—*Where's my Bath Lozenges*? in another, and *Where's my Epsom Salls*? at a third.

"But is the plagiarism so barefaced?" said Bernard, turning to Phosphor: "I must—"

"No you musn't," said Phosphor. "It's all right—if people altered until they got something unlike anything that can be

remembered, we should never have a play at all. There's no plagiarism, but there's a greenhouse in Mrs. Boddle's farce, and a greenhouse in your comedy ; I suppose two people can think of a greenhouse, Mrs. Boddle?" said the manager, getting into a passion.

"I didn't say they couldn't," said the old actress. "I only remarked the likeness."

"There are some likenesses which it might be as well not to remark," retorted Mr. Phosphor, looking insolently at Mrs. Boddle, whose history a quarter of a century before, had been a little notorious.

"That's true," said the old lady, offended at the *innuendo*, and rising to depart. "I have heard people say that some people looked very much like gentlemen, but I can't say I ever remarked it myself." And, taking up the manuscript which Phosphor had thrown to her, she went out.

"Extremely mischievous person in a theatre, that," said Mr. Phosphor, in self-justification ; the fact being, that Mrs. Boddle was one of the most harmless old sinners who ever forgot all the errors of her youth in favour of nearly the only one age cares about—one to which we have delicately alluded.

"When do we do this?" asked Grig.

"Monday," said the manager.

"Fortnight, or three weeks?" said Grig.

"Next Monday of all," returned Phosphor.

"With a pleasing variety of hooks, over any number of sinister shoulders, and don't you wish you may get it?" observed Mr. Wigsby, vaguely, as he went off to his roots in the blanket. He was supposed to imply doubt.

"Lazy old humbug!" said Phosphor, looking after him. "He thinks of nothing but his blessed cow-cabbages."

"But Monday—honour," said Grig, "because I want to be off to Brighton."

"Well, be off to brighten, it's time you should," said the manager, facetiously, "for you are deuced dull now. But we play this on Monday, mind."

"I'll never forgive you if we don't," said Grig, nodding to the author, and departing.

"I shall be sure to break my heart about that," said Phosphor, spitefully, the moment Mr. Grig had disappeared. "Brighton,

indeed ! I remember when he was glad to get a holiday once-a-week to Gravesend, and eat shrimps," continued Phosphor, not choosing to see anything to the actor's credit in the fact that his talents had made him independent.

"How do you wish me to dress *Lady St. Rollox*, Mr. Carlyon !" said Miss Ford, coming up with her prettiest smile.

"Dress ?" said the surprised author, for this was an inquiry he had not anticipated. It was the first time a pretty girl had come up to him requesting him to direct her toilette, and speaking as submissively as if she had the slightest intention of following his dictation. "O—*Lady St. Rollox* is a leader of fashionable society—I am sure I need say no more to Miss Ford."

"The second is an evening dress—a ball dress, I suppose," said Anna, "and that cannot be too handsome."

"Nothing can be too handsome for Miss Ford," said Mr. Carlyon, who at once saw that he was assisting at a farce. And Miss Ford tripped off with a very gracious and comprehensive bow, (as graciously returned by the manager,) and descended to the neat brougham which awaited her at the very stage door to which a few months back, the night must have been very bad when she ventured to summon a hack cab.

"Get in another change of dress for her, if you like," said the manager to Bernard. "She likes dress."

"Are not such things expensive ?" said Carlyon.

"We don't mind it in some cases," replied Phosphor, with a peculiar smile. "Now, Miss Ponsonby, what's the dreadful matter with you ?"

"I have been to the wardrobe, Sir," said the girl, timidly.

"Well, I hope the wardrobe's quite well, and all the sweet little drawers also, not forgetting the pretty pegs. Did you come to tell me that ?"

"No, Sir," said the girl, upon whose careworn face the manager's jocularly awoke no smile. "But I wanted to ask you," she said earnestly,—*"I have had so many new dresses to find lately—and there is a cotton velvet body there which is quite useless now, but to which I could put skirts, which would do quite well for this part, and it would save me money which, since my mother's illness, I can hardly spare—and, of course, Sir, if you chose the skirts should belong to the theatre afterwards."*

"You both surprise and shock me, Miss Ponsonby, by your attempt to defraud the establishment which remunerates you. You undertook to find your own dresses, and if you do not like to do that, give notice and leave us. No lady but yourself seeks to break her engagement. Miss Ford's two dresses in this very piece will cost at least twenty pounds, and yet I have not heard her complain."

The poor girl looked up, and flushed crimson, but she did not dare to say what came to her lips. She only turned away, and lingered for some time in the dark lobby, considering what article of dress she could now best spare to the pawnbroker. It must be the solitary black silk dress—after all, she only wore it when she went to tea at a friend's—she had very few friends—and seldom went to see them—what did it matter? So she went home, and began to brush and carefully refold the black silk dress, for the pawnbroker, just as Miss Ford, and a noble friend upon whose judgment she could rely, were entering Swan and Edgar's.

"Just like them all, trying to swindle you, if they can," said Mr. Phosphor. "Now, Baby Waring, you come here."

A very pretty blue-eyed girl, with a demure look, but with a mouth so rich and rosy that it contradicted the downcast eye, advanced at this appeal.

"Baby Waring," said the manager, "shake hands with Mr. Carlyon."

Bernard thought that a pleasanter face had seldom been turned up, with a half-modest, half-wicked smile, to meet his look, and that a warmer or softer little hand had seldom been placed in his own.

"Baby Waring," said Mr. Phosphor—while Bernard retained the hand—"listen to me. At Mr. Carlyon's express and urgent desire, I have allotted to you the most splendid, the most effective, and the most magnificent part that ever was written for a young lady in this world, whatever she may get in the next. Here it is, the *Aurora Trevor*. If you play it to his satisfaction, perhaps, some day, he may write you another. But if you do not, and likewise to mine, I declare to heaven that not only shall you never speak another line on my stage, but you shall go on for attendants in processions, chambermaids in pantomimes, and the back row in the ballet every night until your time is up.

Remember, you are engaged to me for everything. Do you hear?"

The Baby looked in no wise terrified, but replied, with a charming smile,—

"I hope Mr. Carlyon will be so very kind as to take a little pains with me, and hear me say my words."

"That you must arrange with Mr. Carlyon. I dare say he will do anything in reason."

There was no particular reason, however, why Mr. Carlyon, having given a glance which assured him that Baby was very neatly dressed, should ask her which way she was going to walk, or, as the afternoon was bright, should suggest to her to walk down Regent Street. Because he could not well hear her say her words there. But Baby's face was as pretty a one as they saw in all that ramble—almost as pretty as one that he did not see, but which, in the corner of a carriage, turned pale as Lilian passed him.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A DAUGHTER IS CLAIMED.



UT where was Angela Livingstone, who had been discovered at her suburban theatre by the vigilant Phosphor, and had expressly engaged for the part of *Aurora Trevor*, thus transferred to Baby Waring? That very natural question has now to be answered.

She came to the theatre, signed her engagement, and was duly "called" to the reading of Carlyon's play. But another call was made before the latter event. Mr. Phosphor was closeted with Bernard, discussing certain alterations in the comedy (he suggested them with a freedom of treatment by no means pleasing to the writer, who discontentedly saw his dialogue scored out by the foot, under the pretext of making the piece act "closer"), when a card came up. Phosphor turned to Bernard, and said, deferentially,—

"Will you permit me to allow this person to interrupt us? It is not his rank, or wealth, of course, that weighs with me for a single second, but it may serve the interests of the establishment if I see him. Still, if you object to it, my doors are

hermetically sealed against him until we have done. He may be a lord, but 'a man's a man for a' that.'" And Mr. Phosphor sat immovably, watching the reply, as if uncertain what it would be, and prepared to be guided by Carlyon's sentence. The manager bowed gratefully as the author's assent was given, and the next moment admitted the Earl of Rookbury, who had, according to his manner, walked over everybody and everything, and by sheer loftiness of bearing compelled the daunted officials to conduct him, unbidden, to the presence chamber.

"How d'ye do, Phosphor, old fellow?" said the Earl, with a good-humoured familiarity which had as much contempt as courtesy in it, and which Phosphor perfectly well understood, though affecting to be greatly gratified at the Earl's condescension. "And how are you, Mr. Carlyon?" he added, his manner making his much less familiar greeting far more cordial. "I am disturbing a plot, I fear."

"Mr. Phosphor has just convinced me to the contrary, my Lord," said Bernard, pointing to his manuscript; "he denies the existence of any plot at all in what we are revising."

"Don't pay the slightest heed to what he says," said Lord Rookbury, seating himself. "None of these theatrical people know anything about the drama, and they are all as bigoted as the very deuce. I myself invented the last scene of a ballet once, and produced a mechanical effect which the whole Opera-house management had solemnly declared was utterly impossible."

"I suppose," said Phosphor, humbly, "that I must not remind your Lordship of the circumstances under which that feat was accomplished."

"Yes, you may," said the Earl. "You mean that, as I said it could be done, and as everybody else said it could not, I did it at my own expense."

"Two hundred pounds I think that experiment cost your Lordship."

"Quite that," said the Earl. "But it made the fortunes of the house for the season. Do you remember Madame Aglaia, as she came gliding up through the silver lilies?"

Phosphor remembered that, and also that Lord Rookbury having betted five hundred pounds with an exceedingly wealthy and silly friend of Madame Aglaia that the thing *could* be done, could

very well afford to lay out two hundred to get one of his dearly beloved "pulls;" the rather, too, that his Lordship had disputed the machinist's bills, and starved him into taking off a third of it. But Phosphor did not mention this.

"I'm afraid I shall be unwelcome to both of you, when you know what I've come about," said the Earl. "Phosphor's feelings I don't much care for, because I can make things pleasant for him; but to you, Bernard, I don't know what to say. However, duty knows but one course."

Carlyon looked doubly curious when Lord Rookbury mentioned duty, and wondered what could have put such a word into his head.

"At least," continued his Lordship, "if I am right in supposing that you, Mr. Carlyon, are going to bring out a piece here."

"Mr. Carlyon has favoured me with a very charming piece," said the manager, "into which we have thrown all our best people, intending to make a great hit with it."

"It will be one," said the Earl. "Mr. Carlyon—I say it to his face—is a man to succeed, and you are very lucky in obtaining his aid—very lucky. Secure him, on his own terms, Master Phosphor, for you won't get such a catch every day."

"Your Lordship's opinion is my own," said Phosphor.

"It used to be, in old times, eh?" said the Earl, with a significant look, "and I do not imagine you have grown any wiser. But have you included among your performers a Miss Livingstone?"

"That young lady has just joined us, and we propose to entrust to her the leading part in our comedy."

"Is she in the theatre?"

"I have some idea that she is in the wardrobe," said Mr. Phosphor. "We have so little time to lose that I desired her to see about her dresses at once, and—does your Lordship wish to know her?"

"Please."

The manager pressed his pedal, and orders were given to scour the theatre in search of Miss Livingstone.

"I'll tell you why I want her," said the Earl. "There is no need of mystification and so forth with you, Phosphor, because—in fact you have known me a long time—nor with you

Carlyon, because you are a man of the world and my friend. I am going to take her away from you."

"Is *that* absolutely necessary, my Lord," said Phosphor, in a tone that offended Lord Rookbury, though it was most respectful, and only meant to append, to the manager's concurrence in any plan of his Lordship's, a suggestion that the theatre need not lose Miss Livingstone's services.

"Yes, Sir," said the Earl, snapping at him, viciously; "for a reason, if I am bound to give it, which I suppose you will condescend to think a good one. The young lady is my daughter."

Carlyon stared, being really surprised. This was natural, and therefore he deserves no credit for it. But Phosphor, who was surprised at nothing Lord Rookbury could say—perhaps from old recollections—and who, moreover, did not place the slightest credence in the assertion, merited great praise for the magnificent and artistic look of mingled astonishment and pleasure which he instantly put on. The sight of so good a piece of acting brought back Lord Rookbury's good temper, and he added in a much more courteous manner,—

"Yes, so it appears. It is one of those cases—I speak, as I said, to men of the world—which *will* occur, and in which one's only course is to make reparation as soon as possible. I had lost sight of her, to my unspeakable annoyance, but having discovered her by an accident, I am going to make amends for past neglect."

Mr. Phosphor gradually permitted his astonishment to subside from his face like a dissolving view, and to leave nothing but pleasure, which he next deemed it expedient to dash with a trifle of sentiment, so he set his eyes twinkling, and affected to stifle a light sob. He then got up to offer Lord Rookbury his hand in manly gratulation, but his Lordship, with a queer look, put the ivory head of his umbrella into the manager's gripe, instead of his own hand, and an effect was spoiled.

"All right; thank you, Phosphor," said the Earl. "Well, Mr. Carlyon, you don't tell me whether you forgive me for taking away the leading lady of your play."

Bernard scarcely knew what to believe. But it seemed the safest course to say that it would indeed be selfish to think of his own temporary interests, when the permanent welfare of so charming a person was in question.

"Just what I expected you to say, Bernard," said the peer, "and in keeping with your character."

"I gather," said Mr. Phosphor, in bland, but anxious tones, "that Miss—we will call her Livingstone, until further notice, my Lord—is unaware of the glad tidings which we have just learned. We will withdraw at her approach, nor mar, by a stranger's presence, the pure and holy pleasure of such a meeting. Come, my friend," he added to Bernard, doing the regular business, and pointing to the door.

"Do no such thing, please," said Lord Rookbury. "I will thank you, Phosphor, to introduce me, and Mr. Carlyon to assure the young lady that I *am* Lord Rookbury. Some people whom Phosphor knows might not be in a hurry to credit such a statement, the world's so sadly suspicious."

"Nay," said Phosphor, swallowing down all insult spoken and implied; "when I gaze upon that brow, and upon those features, and listen to that voice, and then recal those of the dear young lady, the resemblance is so marked, that I wonder I can have avoided seeing it."

To this Lord Rookbury made no reply, beyond executing a slight grimace at the ivory handle. The next moment Angela came in. She coloured slightly at finding herself summoned to a triple presence, but Phosphor handed her a chair, and Lord Rookbury, rising, said, in his kindest way,—

"I have a little communication to make you, my dear; but first you should know who it is that has the pleasure of speaking to you. I am the Earl of Rookbury."

Now if Angy had been a better instructed young lady, it is probable that she might have been more disturbed at this announcement. But what did *she* know of the leading names of the past half century, the Parliamentary notorieties, the aristocratic *roués*? How could she appreciate that strange reputation which the old gentleman before her had made for himself, of his victories over prime ministers and *prime donne*, his sinfulness, and his sarcasm, and his stratagems, his borough-mongering, and his turf gambling, his political *status* and his social demerits? To estimate Lord Rookbury, one must have been "well up" in fifty years of English history, and you have no right to expect that at fifty shillings a-week. Angela only *saw* a tall, remarkable, and very courteous old man, who seemed

to have an interest in her ; and so, when he uttered the name at which clubs looked up, and peers (if respectable) looked down, she simply replied,—

“ Oh, I’m sure I’m very glad.” Meaning, probably, that she was glad to make his acquaintance.

“ As you have never seen me before, and possibly never heard of me,” said the Earl, “ you should be assured that I am what I say, though I don’t suppose you are likely to doubt it. Your manager, Mr. Phosphor, has known me of old, and Mr. Carlyon here has visited me, and can certify to me.”

“ This is, certainly, Lord Rookbury,” said Mr. Carlyon, gravely. “ I am ready to certify that,” he said, with a slight emphasis on the last word. The Earl caught it, and in his heart rather approved the feeling that enjoined it.

“ I should not have thought of doubting a gentleman’s word,” said Angela. “ What needs this iteration ?”

“ You are quite right, my dear,” said the Earl. “ But I am about to be something more to you than a gentleman. I will tell you, in the simplest words, for I see that you are a girl of good sense, in what position you and I suddenly find ourselves. You were brought up by a couple named Lobb, to whose support you have since worthily and nobly contributed, and with whom you are still residing.”

“ Well,” said Angela, “ considering that you are speaking of one’s father and mother, I don’t see that there is anything particularly noble in one’s trying to help them.”

“ And now, my dear,” said the Earl, “ for one of those discoveries which I dare say you have made a hundred times on the stage, but which are not so common in private life. I have to inform you that your father stands before you.”

Poor Angela did not know exactly what to reply. Her first conviction was that the whole thing was what she would, I fear, have termed a “ sell,” and she was about to repay it with a smart answer. But, looking at Lord Rookbury, he appeared so gentlemanly, and so much in earnest, that it was difficult to believe him a partner in any mystery—and then there was Mr. Carlyon, whose character she knew through Paul Chequerbent, and he stood gravely by, a witness—and lastly, the manager was doing one of his very best bits of pantomimic sympathy, which Angela did not yet know him well enough to estimate

duly. She rose from her chair, and then sat down again, sorely troubled.

"I can quite understand your surprise, my dear child," said the Earl. "As yet, indeed, you hardly believe us in earnest. This you will very soon find is the case, but it will be kindest to you to defer any other explanations until you have somewhat recollected yourself. Only understand this—I have recently discovered our relationship, and am anxious to make amends to you for the long time it has remained undiscovered. I preferred seeing you here to visiting you at home, because here I am known, and because I also wished to tell you, in the presence of Mr. Phosphor, that the stage is no longer your calling. Now, my dear child, give me your hand. There. And now, not another word until you have had time to think. Take this card, and come to my house in Acheron Square, as soon as you feel disposed. I will be at home all to-morrow morning. Then I shall have the pleasure of telling you what I intend to do for you."

He drew the girl towards him, bewildered and trembling, and kissed her forehead.

"Mr. Carlyon," he said, "you are an acquaintance of my daughter's, and a friend of my own. I shall be much indebted for your kind offices in assuring this child of the reality of what she has heard, and which seems to her like a dream. You will also advise her on one or two other matters."

Angela began to cry, poor girl.

"To-morrow, in Acheron Square," said the Earl, pressing her hand. "Until then, the less *we* say to one another the better. Phosphor, I will see you in a day or two. Mr. Carlyon, I have some little claim, is it not so, to ask your assistance?"

"Every claim, my Lord," said Carlyon. "But one word with you, before matters go further."

"I know the word," said the Earl, smiling; "and, all things considered, I have no right to be offended at your saying it. I will anticipate it. Come this way." And they went out together, and in a couple of minutes Carlyon returned, looking thoughtful, but not dissatisfied. I hope I need not say that the regret at the injury to his play had utterly vanished from his mind.

Angela looked up at him quite piteously, as he approached her, and begged him to tell her what it all meant, and whether *they were playing* with her feelings.

"Certainly not, dear Miss Livingstone," said Bernard. "That person, I am able to assure you, is Lord Rookbury, one of the richest and most influential men of the day. He has just assured me, in the most solemn manner, that you are his daughter. It is a matter, therefore, for the warmest congratulation that he should claim you ; and I congratulate you most heartily, though a sufferer by your good fortune."

Mr. Phosphor's face, during this speech, had resembled a series of living pictures from the work of Lavater. This had been a most favourable opportunity for the delineation of the passions, and he had availed himself of it. He now laid his head upon the table. His shoulders went up and down, and as his breath came forth in agitated fits, it is fair to infer that this last pantomime indicated exceeding grief. The actress who would, at a different moment, have smiled and applauded, was moved. Herself excited, she was ready to suppose excitement in another. But the author had formed a juster estimate of the performance, and he signed to Angela, who was about to rise, to wait the issue. Perhaps the manager expected to be comforted, but as nobody seemed to begin the process, he wiped away some imaginary tears, and started to his feet.

"Miss Livingstone," he said, in his finest style, "I am grieved—but still I rejoice. Here is your engagement," he said, darting at a pigeon-hole, lettered L, and plucking out a solitary document. "Thus I scatter it to the winds," he added, tearing the paper in halves.

'For I would sooner stop the unchained dove,
When swift returning to his home of love,
And round its snowy wing new fetters twine,
Than turn one farthing by yon bond of thine.'

"It remains to me to congratulate you, as I do most fervently, upon your advancement, and to hope that in the day of your glory you will not altogether forget those who hoped to cradle your fame."

Despite the manager's volcanic manner, the act and the words were kind, and Angy endeavoured to express her acknowledgments. But Mr. Phosphor would hear nothing.

"I had anticipated a brilliant run for the play," he said, "thanks to your genius illustrating that of the author. But it was not to be. Mr. Carlyon, I fear that this interlude has

unfitted us all for serious performance. So, perhaps, as Miss Livingstone has been committed to your guardianship, you will escort her home; or where you will. 'For my own part, I will go pray.' Bless you, my dear young lady, and you, my gifted friend (whom I shall be glad to see to-morrow at twelve o'clock), bless *you* too, and adieu!" He again laid his head on the table, and Carlyon led Angela out.

As soon as they were gone, Mr. Phosphor lifted himself up, and proceeded to execute a sort of frantic hornpipe about the room, clenching his hands and gnashing his teeth at intervals. Relieved by this exercise, he observed that the "sentimentalibus lacrymæ roarem" was off his mind. The next thing Mr. Phosphor executed was a composition which nobody but himself and the printer was permitted to see that night, but which, by eleven o'clock the following morning, was hanging in every public-house and pastrycook's shop in London, was exhibited in every omnibus, and was posted in gigantic letters upon every dead wall and hoarding, was paraded upon vast boards, which a legion of mercenaries bore like standards into every quarter of the town, was blazoned in every newspaper, and was the subject in most journals of a special and most inviting paragraph. In short, by the hour we have mentioned, every one of Lord Rookbury's aristocratic acquaintances, in addition to many thousands of more plebeian Londoners, was made aware of the fact that

MISS ANGELA LIVINGSTONE,

Having been miraculously discovered to be

THE LONG-LOST SCION OF A NOBLE FAMILY,

Would not be able to make her first appearance at that
Theatre, as had been intended,

BUT

AN OCCASIONAL ADDRESS,

AND A

FAREWELL TO THE BRITISH PUBLIC,

(Including a detail of all the circumstances,) would be
spoken for her by MR. PHOSPHOR.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A SCENE WITH THE LORD CHAMBERLAIN.



R. PHOSPHOR was true to his word. At least, on the following Saturday his *affiches* announced a new comedy for the Monday, and the title, which had been hitherto kept back, lest some rival theatre should steal it, was then allowed to appear. And Bernard, as he walked down to rehearsal, was met at every turn, by a line, which, absurd as the action might be, he could not help pausing to contemplate on at least thirty different play-bills. It was THE SLAVES OF THE RING.

He had been so very kind as to hear Baby Waring say her words ; and not being satisfied with the way she said them the first time, Bernard had insisted on the lesson being repeated : and, indeed, had bestowed much pains upon her. He had met her at rehearsal every day, and had twice or three times escorted her at rehearsal, by a very circuitous route, for which there could be no necessity, as she had been accustomed to come and go alone, or said so. And upon the other mornings, he had not attended her from the theatre, because, at her own suggestion, he had met her at the corner of the next street but one, and thus saved her from the observation of her fellow-performers. He had taken her to dine at Blackwall, and also at Richmond, and they had returned in the evening, just in time to get her into the theatre before her absence could be noticed. He had given her a new bonnet, a ring with pearls and rubies in it, and a box of French gloves. Now, all this might be very necessary and fitting attention on the part of a young dramatist towards one of his actresses ; but if it were essential to show so much attention to one of his actresses, why did not Bernard treat Mrs. Boddle in the same way as he treated the rosy-mouthed Baby ?

But when Carlyon entered the theatre on the Saturday, the manager met him with a vexed countenance, and put the manuscript of the play into his hand.

"Do you know the Lord Chamberlain's office ?" he asked.

"Yes," said Bernard ; "I have seen a brass plate at St. James's Palace, with some such words on it."

"Then get into a cab, and go down and see his Lordship, and convince him that there is nothing in your play calculated to bring down the constitution, either in Church or State, or else we can't produce it on Monday. I have had a note from Mr. Anlace, saying that we are not to have the licence."

Lord Doveton, the Lord Chamberlain, was the most amiable of men. He would not willingly have caused or permitted suffering to any human being. But if there were an exception to his rule of kindness—if there were anybody for whom he did not entertain so warm a sympathy as for the rest of the world, it was an author. But even an author, much as Lord Doveton deplored his existence, he would not have put harshly out of the world. His Lordship would have shut him up in a pleasant garden, with plenty of provision for his innocent and inoffensive recreation (taking care, of course, that there was no Eve to preserve the race of undesirable beings), and would have kept him there until he became painlessly extinct. Lord Doveton was not an obtuse man; on the contrary, he had done statesman's service in his time, but he could never see the use of an author. And Plato would not have more rigidly excluded a poet from a model state, than Lord Doveton would, if he could have done it gently, have banished a dramatist. But as this could not well be done, and as the mode Alcibiades adopted with a satiric comedian—that of drowning him—was as impracticable, and would have been even more repulsive to Lord Doveton's nature, it only remained for his Lordship to take care that so mischievous a creature should do no mischief which the chamberlain's wand could avert. He seemed perpetually to address a writer in the language of the lady in Pope:—

"Come—only be a good kind soul,
Who dares tell neither truth nor lies."

Yet Lord Doveton managed to do a great deal of harm, and to give an enormous amount of trouble to people who felt that the fault was hardly with him, but with those who had invited him to a situation in which his peculiar temperament necessarily required him to interfere in matters at which a stronger man would have smiled.

His Lordship received Carlyon with the most perfect courtesy, and even opened the conversation by a gracious regret that he *had been obliged* to withhold from the public a work of so much

talent. But he had no doubt Mr. Carlyon would see the propriety of the interdiction.

Mr. Carlyon hoped to induce his Lordship to remove it, and would respectfully beg Lord Doveton to point out the objectionable portions of the play. His Lordship sent for his own copy, and while it was being fetched, expressed a trust (which, had the Lord Chamberlain been a less kindly person, would have been a sarcasm) that theatrical interests were flourishing. The play was then brought for examination.

"In the first place, Mr. Carlyon, the name of your play is open to objection," said his Lordship. You call it the *Slaves of the Ring*, the 'ring' referring to marriage. Now, you are doubtless aware that at this moment there is a bill under discussion by the legislature upon the very subject of marriages in Scotland. You must see that this title is calculated to give offence. Suppose, Mr. Carlyon, instead of answering these objections in detail, you make a note of each in your own copy, and consider them at your leisure."

"Leisure," thought Carlyon, "and the last rehearsal but one going on while he speaks." But he took out his pencil.

"Now, in the list of characters, I observe 'Lord St. Rollox.' I have no doubt that you had too much good taste to intend this for an allusion to Lord * * *, but pray alter this name, as St. Rollox sounds a little like the first half of his title before his last elevation."

Carlyon smiled, and noted this.

"In the opening soliloquy," said Lord Doveton, "this nobleman observes, 'I wish I had kept my wife in Herefordshire.' Now it so happens that there is but one nobleman in that county who has differences with his wife, and therefore you had better alter the county, or, still better, say, 'I wish I had kept my wife in the country.'"

Bernard bowed, and wondered who the non-uxorious nobleman was.

"On page 3, Mr. Carlyon," continued his Lordship, "the American servant has a sneer at 'Highgate's Ointment.' Now I do not suppose that Mr. Highgate's Ointment is so infallible as he alleges, but as he is an indefatigable tradesman, and this is a trading country, the Government, at this commercial crisis, do not feel justified in sanctioning his interests being injured by

the American's remark that in Kentucky they cure all the hams at once by putting Highgate's ointment into the pig's trough. Say 'a quack medicine,' if you like."

This also was duly noted by the author, who scarcely dared to look up.

"Now in page 5, if you please," said the Lord Chamberlain, "I see that Lady St. Rollox says, 'Yes, Sir Malachite, but a good painting may be hung in a bad light.' Now this may be taken in two ways. Either it is a severe remark directed against the Committee of the Royal Academy, whose exhibition is now open, and who are a most respectable and influential body, and must not be insulted, or else it is a stricture against Government, in reference to the treatment of the Vernon Collection, in which case I need hardly say the observation is uncalled for."

Carlyon could not trust himself with more than a bow, but he made some strange marks on the manuscript.

"A word, only one, in page 7. 'Good gracious, Foambell, don't be so positive. You would contradict Babbage's calculating machine.' We don't like names to be introduced—say *the* calculating machine, please.

"And now, Mr. Carlyon, we come to a very serious matter, and one which makes me doubt whether, under any circumstances, I can license this comedy. This you need not write down, but have the kindness to consider what I say. Your Sir Malachite, a person of low birth, who has been knighted by an accident (*that*, you must of course remove, as everybody knows to whom you refer), seeks to seduce the wife of a nobleman. Now, in these times, what can I say to this?"

"I would merely say, my Lord," said Carlyon, "that though your Lordship and your predecessors have hitherto protected the monopoly of theatrical vice, I have thought myself justified in opening a little free trade. From time immemorial the stage seducer and libertine has always been a nobleman, and his victim a plebeian. Every drama intended for the lower classes is framed in the spirit of one of their most popular songs, 'See the star-breasted villain to yonder cot bound!' People have been taught to believe the aristocracy one mass of cruel, ignorant, and selfish Don Juans. That this sort of representation has been always permitted, and is at this moment taking place in a *dozen theatres* attended by the class upon whom these amuse-

ments really make an impression, is a fact to which the attention of your Lordship's office has no doubt been directed. But in selecting my libertine from another body than the House of Lords, I venture to think that if I have not done a good service, I have exhibited a good motive."

"There is much in what you say, Mr. Carlyon, and I deplore the habit which has arisen of permitting the class of pieces you describe. But my business is with the drama immediately before me. In making the libertine a man of the people, you excite attention to antagonistic principles, and that is very undesirable. All is very quiet in the country just now, and we will try to keep it so."

"It is a spurious quiet, my Lord, that turns its back upon a danger, and denies the existence of what it refuses to behold," said Bernard.

"All politics are a compromise, you know," said Lord Doveton, smiling. "But we are straying from business. You feel strongly upon a matter connected with your profession, Mr. Carlyon, and that is a sure omen of your success in it. But unless you are willing to alter your comedy in conformity with an opinion which I see no cause to change, I fear you must reckon its prohibition as one of the obstacles, in spite of which I have no doubt you will one day attain deserved popularity."

What could Carlyon do? Bow, and having ascertained from the Chamberlain that, subject to the alterations he had dictated, and a few similar ones afterwards mentioned by Lord Doveton, there would be no further objection to the play, take it to the theatre, and alter it in conformity with instructions. The *Slaves of the Ring*, after a volley of execrations from Mr. Phosphor, directed against hereditary nobility in general, and the gentle Lord Doveton in particular (whom Phosphor was certain could be impeached, if a Member of Parliament would only take the matter up), was re-baptized as "*Love, Honour, and Obey*," Lord St. Rollox was called Lord Serpentine, and was made to regret that he had not kept his wife in sight of the Wrekin. The Yankeeism was struck out, to the improvement of the piece, and in deference to the quack-salver, and the innocent statement that a picture might be hung in a bad light was altered to some other common-place, which could not offend the Academy or the Vernon Trust. The complimentary mention of the most

extraordinary mechanical mathematician in the world was suppressed, and the great grievance, Sir Malachite's low birth, was redressed, to the remarkable advantage of the aristocracy, by an awkward discovery that he was the illegitimate child of another "star-breasted villain," who had to be dragged in, most inartificially, at the end of a piece in which he had never been heard of previously.

Thus cleared of "offence," the comedy was produced.

It was a decided success. A telling speech, early in the play, put the house into good humour, which luckily lasted throughout. The drama, like the earlier works of most authors, and the later ones of a great many, was deficient in plot and structural arrangement, but it had something fresh and real about it, the personages were not mere stage conventions, and it opened a fire of smart things which was kept up with great spirit. The curtain, at the end of the first act, came down upon a good and startling "situation." Bernard had hidden himself in the corner of his private box, but now ventured to look round the house, and to make out various friends, posted in favourable positions for backing up the piece, if necessary. But there was one friend whom Carlyon did not see, for she was hidden behind her curtain, and did not lean forward, but she sat opposite to the author, and was not the least observant spectator in the house.

Baby Waring opened the second act, and dashed away with a confidence which, by contrast with the careful, first-night delivery of her companions, showed that some extraordinary and intelligent drilling had been bestowed upon her. A round of applause rattled about the house, as Baby concluded a well-conceived scene, between smiles and tears, and Carlyon added his own applause, which the pretty actress acknowledged by a most affectionate look, thrown into the private box. It was seen elsewhere, and though Lillian Trevelyan could not note the gesture which returned it, she saw enough to stir a certain pang into biting shrewdly. She lost the thread of the plot, and the rest of the play to her was a mere vision of forms coming in and passing away.

The play ended, amid a perfect storm of plaudits from all parts of the house. Every actor was called before the curtain, and Baby Waring, amid her smiles and flurry, had another *opportunity of sending a fire-glance into Carlyon's box.* Then

came the cries for the author, and when these had been long, loud, and peremptory, Carlyon rose and bowed, and all the faces turned round upon him, and made him feel that he was somebody in the world. And then he went down to the Green-room, now warm, and lighted, and glittering with mirrors, in which the dresses of the actors in the spectacle which was to follow were reflected over and over until the glasses presented a chaos of embroidery. Every kind of congratulation was lavished upon him by the actors, who are usually in earnest in wishing success, even when they have done little to promote it—an *esprit de corps* making them greatly dislike unfavourable theatrical criticisms by the public. Many a hand greeted Carlyon, and many a pleasant voice assured him that a triumph, founded not on accident, but on sound and sterling merit, ought to be followed up. Miss Anna Ford came in, and assured him that a very distinguished person in the proscenium box appeared very much pleased with the play, and Mrs. Boddle ecstatically declared it reminded her of the first night (as Carlyon understood her) of some drama of Sheridan's, but that could hardly be within her recollection, and her recollection itself was just then a little turbid, from an extra infusion of a stimulating order. Wigsby, for the moment forgetting his ranunculuses, remembered to tell Bernard that he had done his best with an ungrateful part, and that Carlyon must recollect that he owed him a "sugar-plum" in his next play. But amid the excitement of congratulation Carlyon did not forget a little scene which had followed the reading of his play, and seeing poor little Miss Ponsonby pass the Green-room door, in her bonnet and shawl, making her hasty way home to her sick mother, he called to beg her to come in. The poor child was not over-anxious to parade her old brown stuff frock, and well-washed shawl, under the strong light of the Green-room, but she obeyed meekly enough.

"You were not going, I hope, Miss Ponsonby," said Carlyon, in a voice at once kind and respectful, as he took her hand—it was in a silk glove of divers darns—"without allowing me to thank you, very sincerely, for your exertions to-night. There is nobody to whom I am more indebted for the success of the piece, and—if my opinion on that point be worth your having,—both your dresses were remarkably neat and becoming."

And the gratified girl drew back, and hastened with a light

step to her squalid home—a few kind words are so valuable to some people that it is a sin to omit them when they are merited, and scarcely a sin to bestow them when they are not.

“Very pretty praises, indeed, said Baby Waring, coming in. She had changed her stage dress for her usual coquettishly neat and close-fitting, but quiet attire. “And now will you please to praise me? Did I not say all my words right?”

Carlyon hesitated for a moment. He felt half inclined to go into the front of the house, and receive more congratulations, for they are things for which we easily acquire an appetite. But he conquered this desire by an effort of self-command, rendered easier by circumstances. He was far too much elated to go home. He whispered something to Baby, who smiled and shook her curls—

“Well, I’m sure,” she said. “Yes—if you like.”

He had, of course, merely asked her to go to the Haymarket, and have some supper. And as she was graciously pleased to assent, he conducted her to the stage-door, where, not being able to obtain a cab, they had to go round to the street before the theatre. And there, as Carlyon, with Baby on his arm, was waiting for a vehicle to draw up, a lady and gentleman came down from the house to their own carriage. The man was Mr. Heywood, but him Bernard hardly recognised, for by this time he had confronted the blue eyes of Lilian Trevelyan.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A PRIEST’S CELL.



COTTAGE *ornée*, while it continues a mere cottage, is the prettiest, if not the pleasantest place one can live in. But it should remain as originally planned. If all the advantages of a great house are to be aimed at in a little one, the latter becomes an absurdity, for living in a cottage implies a certain amount of restraint and of self-denial, and if one can dispense with these, why live in a cottage? What numbers of charming little homes, built in perfect taste, and with an eye to real cottage life, have been distended, distorted, and destroyed by tenants who, like *the weeds* over the late Mr. Gifford’s Anna, “had no business

there." The rising—and early-rising—politician, taking his morning ride, sees one of these modest nests, and is struck by the thought that it would be a delightful place to study Mill and Bentham in, and suck out the mystery of Blue Books. He takes it, and is so pleased at not hearing carriage wheels, that he wants a library. He builds one, three times as large as any room in the cottage—sits down in it and composes a crack speech—the Minister notices him—Lady Caroline Lorimer marries him—the cottage is To Let. It is taken by a rich stockbroker, for somebody whom he sometimes introduces as his wife, never to his wife. The M.P. was content to put up his horses at the inn-stables, but Mrs. Montmorency (*vide* Muggs) must have a coach-house for her brougham and her little chaise, and a stall with enamelled mangers for the darling long-tailed ponies, Lord Archibald's farewell present. So a huge library, coach-house, and stables are added to our poor little cottage. But Pernambuco Bonds suddenly drop, and there is something rotten, old city men say, elsewhere, for the funds are at par—a case of high fever—the stockbroker is out of the "house," and the sheriff is in the cottage. Mrs. Montmorency, who was always predicting something of the sort, particularly when she wanted reassuring with a little jewellery, is gone to Paris. Mrs. Knautch, the wealthy half-caste widow from Calcutta, whose life is devoted to keeping his in her sickly yellow little boy, James M'Jaggernaut Knautch, the only child of herself and the deceased Scotch Political Resident at Hadgicumbad, is pleased with the cottage, and buys it. She builds a new bath-room, and runs out a great pavilion to the south (the best side of the house, but what signifies that under the circumstances?), with a glass roof and felt and flannel lining, where the young M'Jaggernaut can languish about with his Ayah in all weathers. Just as it is finished, James imprudently looks out at an east window, and speedily rejoins his father in whatever place (no doubt a comfortable one) Scotch Political Residents go to. The lady of the Indian weeds weds the sleek plump clergyman who has visited her in her affliction. The clergyman, who, notwithstanding his sleekness, is a faithful pastor, wants a school-room for his Sunday scholars, and proposes to use the pavilion, but the poor Indian lady will not allow a bandelore and a chicken's merry-thought, her lost child's favourite playthings, to be moved from the floor

where he had last left them. So our cottage is further improved by a long school-house being annexed to Mrs. Montmorency's stables. The Bishop calls, after a confirmation, is pleased with the particular Madeira and rigid orthodoxy of his host, and when the bed-ridden rector's gout flies to his stomach, our clergyman gets the living. There is a capital rectory-house, with pineries, close to the church, and the cottage is once more To Let. A crack party of guardsmen take it for a month, through a confidential box-keeper in a white cravat, who imprudently mystifies the clergyman as to the object of his employers, hinting at a charity bazaar for the benefit of the Moravian Missions, which the Church rather recognises than not. Private theatricals are got up in the M'Jaggernaut pavilion, and Mrs. Joybells comes down, with her beautiful laugh and her beautiful sister, to play "Biddy Nutts" and "Mrs. Trictrac." But a groom who gets confused between *his* various missions (none of them very Moravian in character) of scene-shifting, dressing his masters, laying the supper, beating the drum, playing supernumerary, and generally making himself useful and tipsy, sets fire to the library, and having vainly attempted to extinguish the flames with the contents of the decanters, with a "happy audacity" locks the door and says nothing on the subject, until the parish engine opens upon the supper party, and washes the lobster salad into Captain de Belvedere's embroidered shirt bosom. That side of the house is destroyed, but the Guards send the clergyman a most polite and gentlemanly note with a cheque, which leave nothing to be desired. The damage is repaired, at the least possible expense, by running up brickwork to hide the hole, and whitewashing it on the outside. And then the poor cottage, with all its *addenda* and *delenda*, utterly perverted from the pretty thing it was when Mr. St. Precis (now a severely baited Under-Secretary of State) took that morning's ride, accepts one of the two policemen of the village in the light of a tenant, until other occupants shall be caught.

Different had been the fortunes of a cottage, in which, three days after the encounter at the theatre-door, Carlyon met Lilian Trevelyan. It stood at a short distance from the Thames, and about twenty miles from the metropolis. The village in whose neighbourhood it was placed had little to recommend it but its *quietness*, and the permission which its seclusion afforded for

the practice of not an ungraceful economy. A railroad, which had cloven that part of the county, had luckily flung down its iron rod some miles from Slingsfield, and the steam-scream was faintly heard through the intervening woodlands. The lazy barge and the fisherman's blunt-ended punt were the only vessels that glided under the cottage windows, except when a weary party of rowers, spending their strength for nought, rushed wildly past, with flushed faces and starting muscles, in piteous contrast with the calm repose around. The infrequent report of the gun, announcing the death or escape of field-fare or wood-pigeon—for there was little titled game in the neighbourhood—was the noisiest sound heard during many a month at Slingsfield. It was, in truth, as tranquil a place as one could wish for,—a quiet corner in the world's arena, where one could regain one's breath after the last life-grapple, and nerve one's strength for the next.

The cottage—Lily Nook it had been called by one set of owners, who liked that name better than Estramadura House, the ambitious title it first bore—was really a cottage. Except where the surrounding trees had been partially cleared away to afford a better view of the bright stream behind it, the house was completely shrouded from sight by foliage; and along the little-frequented road in front a traveller might pass without noticing the building, unless the curling smoke caught his eye, or a tiny gate, dividing the luxuriant hedge, attracted his attention as he went by. But had a traveller on the morning we are about to describe pushed back that usually unresisting wicket, he would instantly have found himself in a pleasant resting-place, rendered chiefly pleasant by the innumerable tokens of a feminine presence and care. A large garden, a considerable portion of which was laid in smooth grass, studded with plots of rich-looking earth, thick with flowers—chosen as much for their grace and brightness as for their conventional value—filled the space between the hedge and the rose-clustered verandah of the cottage. A grave macaw walked heavily about, occasionally uttering a gentle croak, apparently seeing no object in screaming. An Italian greyhound, its nose curiously hidden under its fragile paws, reposed on a garden chair, beneath which slumbered a priceless King Charles's spaniel, whose tail, troubled by a dream, afforded subject for speculation to the great bird. A long-spouted,

light-built watering-pot lay on the grass, near a large basket, scissors, and a pair of gardening gloves ; so that unless the traveller were as dull as if he were travelling for the purpose of making a book, he could not fail to divine that a lady had recently been interrupted in some light floricultural duty.

There, for the time, Miss Trevelyan and her uncle were pleasantly lodged, and their host was the priest—the Reverend Cyprian Heywood.

Heywood's father had been a man of note and of notoriety. His pedigree was derived from the stern, strange, fiery house which kept Europe in blood and broil for five hundred stormy years, and, as a modern fashionable historian records, "never shed the blood of a woman." The elder Heywood was placed, in early life, in one of those departments of our military service in which both intellect and its severe cultivation are necessary to success. The young engineer speedily distinguished himself, and an accident which brought a model of his preparation under the eye of a royal soldier, would have ensured his merits a due appreciation, and have rewarded them by a speedy promotion ; but, unhappily for Heywood, he was a thinker, in times when few authorities could safely allow young men to think. And he thought intemperately—be this the proof.

Alfred Heywood, descendant of the Royal Plantagenets, lieutenant in the Royal Engineers, *protégé* of a Royal Duke, became a Radical. And Heywood was not a man who, having become a convert, could nurse his new creed in safety. The startled mess-table soon had the benefit of his illumination, and the Colonel (who hated Alfred's good looks and drawing-room successes) lost no time in apprising the Duke that his young friend the Lieutenant disapproved of the hanging the Nottingham rioters. Almost anybody else would have been at once dismissed the service.

But the House of Brunswick has at times manifested a regard for talent, a regard which, had that house's immediate predecessors shown more frequently, 1688 might have been a less significant number. That model pontoon was the cleverest thing the Duke had ever seen, and his Royal Highness declared he would never believe that a man who could make that could really talk such d— something nonsense. He sent for Heywood, and in *the most* good-natured manner, told him he supposed that the

young man had been indulging in the bottle, that he, the Duke, was not an ascetic, and liked good wine and a good lot of it, but there were times and seasons, and so forth. But Heywood was too young to take the Duke's kindly hint, and instead of darting through the loophole, thought he had obtained a capital opportunity of turning a Prince of the Blood into a Democrat. So, premising that a Plantagenet could have no sympathy with the rabble, as rabble, Heywood explained to the Duke the real object of all governments, and laid down a variety of propositions which his Royal Highness remarked, "we had been in the habit of hearing only from their proper place, the criminal's dock at the Old Bailey." Heywood was undaunted, but at last the Duke, who could put up with much from a man who could put down such a pontoon, indignantly demanded that the earnest orator should give his word of honour never to breathe another word of politics before his brother officers. This Heywood refused, and his horsefaced Colonel had the speedy satisfaction of announcing to the mess that his rival was no longer in His Majesty's army.

The dauntless Alfred brought his case before the public, and obtained some sympathy. Some of the Radical clubs wished to engage him as a public lecturer on democracy—a teacher whose duties, in those days, demanded no small amount of military pluck. But the refined ex-soldier found his patrons so dirty, and, moreover, was so incensed at their complaints that he denounced king-craft instead of King George, that he speedily renounced them; and refraining from personal intercourse, enlightened them and the world in a series of tracts, for which he was incontinently fined and imprisoned. This, of course, confirmed him in his principles; he escaped to America, and was offered all kinds of rewards if he would bring his engineering skill, then greatly in demand with the Americans, to bear against his countrymen. Oswego, then about to be taken by the English, was pointed out to him as a place which, if he could save, he might name his guerdon. He named his second, and shot the officer dead who brought him the proposal. Heywood then managed to reach Trinidad, where he was very well received, and might have become a planter; but choosing rather to advocate, in society, the rights of the blacks, nothing could have saved him from being murdered, but an insurrection of

the blacks themselves, in a portion of the island where resided a family to which he had peculiarly attached himself. The negroes threatened to sack the house, Heywood waxed furious, forgot all the rights of colour, and hurried to the defence of his host's beautiful daughters. By a contrivance which savoured more of the officer of engineers than the liberator of mankind, he skilfully blew up a whole barn-full of blood-thirsty blacks, and so terrified the other assailants, that the militia shot them down with great comfort and safety. The feat obtained for the deliverer the hand of a young lady, whom her sangaree-toping father had refused to the handsome reformer; and after the peace they came to England. There Heywood recommenced writing Radicalism: and one day, while correcting the sheets of a treatise proving that we had no right to attack Napoleon, he knocked down the publisher for using an offensive term about the Duke of Wellington. As good, zealous, vulgar partymen said—What *was* to be done with such a man?

Alfred could spend money, and his wife could not save it. He became embarrassed, and retired into Wales, whence he issued manifestoes proving the illegality of imprisonment for debt. During this retirement his wife, the Creole, died, having perhaps but scarcely softened the misfortunes of her ardent, affectionate husband, by her lack of endurance, and her murmuring reminiscences of the days of Trinidad luxury. But Heywood's love endured to the last. His affections were as strong as his energies, and he suffered more under this shock than under all his other troubles. But he continued to write; and, as various changes and reforms took place from time to time, and as he had written recommending them all, and more, he regularly attributed every measure to the result to his own suggestions. The passing of the Reform Act (which he considered as having been chiefly brought about by eight pamphlets of his, at three-pence each) induced him to apply to Earl Grey for a situation, but not obtaining this, he wrote a ninth pamphlet, showing that Whiggism was mere oligarchy, and that no nation could prosper under it.

So the elder Heywood lived, and so he died—a slave to impulse, and mistaking impulse for conviction. Thoroughly honest, and utterly useless. Sometimes atoning for a horribly irascible *disposition* by acts of almost feminine kindness, and at other

times making the few who knew his worth ashamed to defend him against the many who were irritated by his folly. He had but one son, and of him we have already seen something. What was the son of such a man likely to be? Hitherto he has been seen only as the sceptical scorner of his fellows, and of their works and ways. And this was no assumed character—no mask to be thrown off, stage fashion. Contemptuous antagonism was the habitual attitude of Cyprian Heywood's mind.

He had loved his father with an affection intensely reciprocated. Were it not profane to wish the absence of such a regard, it had been desirable, perhaps, that the two hearts had been more estranged. For the younger man's sake, it had been better that separation had occurred, and that his training had been entrusted to other hands than those of his accomplished and most untrustable father. What could he learn of self-control, of perseverance, of worldly wisdom, from the fiery ex-soldier, duellist and moralist? And even the ordinary studies, which no one was more competent to guide than Mr. Heywood, and which were begun upon a sound and intellectual plan, were always abandoned by the elder man, with a speed beyond the proverbial fickleness of youth. But nothing separated that father and that son until the death of the elder Heywood, and then Cyprian was left, with scant means, a fine person, a keen intellect, and an untrained moral nature, to do his share in the battle of life. He soon learned to step aside, and to scoff at honest and energetic combatants.

But the son of such a man as Alfred Heywood could not become the vulgar, heartless scorner, in whose seat we are warned from sitting. The process which had brought him to the condition of mind we have indicated, had also furnished him with reasons for the want of faith that was in him. He despised, but thought he knew why. His mind had been warped by defective training, his spirit soured by the circumstances which embittered his father's life and his own early days, and false reasoning was the result, but still there was reason. He was no morose cynic, constitutionally bitter. On the contrary, when Cyprian Heywood gave himself to the revel, or to that other youthful folly, which, in Soyerian phrase, is "stock" for romances, none laughed louder, or whispered more passionately. He had the

power of enjoyment—a gift less largely diffused than most people believe. But neither his nature nor his circumstances allowed him to think of pleasure as life's business; and yet what better occupation did he follow—that proud man, who imagined that when he retired within himself, and sneered at all that pleased himself and others, he was wiser than they?

Heywood's means, some relics of the Trinidad fortune, were scant, but they relieved him from the necessity of daily toil, another misfortune to such a mind. A few literary ventures, all unsuccessful, (for the man who struggles against the utterances of the heart has small chance to reach the hearts of others, and Heywood selected themes on the passions for his subjects, as men of that class often will,) two or three efforts to obtain employment from the State, which met with a still more discouraging fate, and Heywood settled in his own mind that he was, as his father had been, a martyr, of whom the world was not worthy. There was no work for him on earth, that was clear.

Whether it were a providential interposition or an unlucky chance that at this crisis of his life threw him into the society of a Jesuit priest older than himself, but whose nature either was similar to his own, or was so fashioned for the occasion, is a problem which a reader will solve according to his own system of theological algebra. The young Heywood talked through a good many evenings with his friend, and with a sudden access of hereditary impulse determined on having a view of the world from a new position—the Rock of Rome. He entered a Jesuit establishment, and was speedily appreciated, and made to feel that it was so. He emerged, in due course, a member of the society, and after the lapse of several of the best years of life, we find him at the outset of our tale still serving in the ranks of the order. The service must have suited him. It is said that the order can find service that suits every mind, though I suspect that this is not the key to the Jesuit riddle. But be this as it may, Cyprian Heywood was held fast by the arms of the Eternal Church, and enjoyed his captivity more than he had enjoyed his purposeless freedom.

Lily Nook was the house which, on the expulsion of the Trevelyans from Aspen Court by the victorious Wilmslows, Heywood had provided for Miss Trevelyan and her uncle. We

have seen them in their temporary sojourn in the ugly house of the grim apothecary, Mardyke, at Lynfield. They are now in a more graceful shelter, and Heywood is their host.

And now for a few words showing why we shall henceforth have little time for lingering. Who remembers—who does not remember—one of those grand events which, in late spring or early summer assemble our thousands and tens of thousands? The head of Church and State is there, with the best of the nobles, and surrounded by the richest gathering ever made, in these days, of a nation's youth, and beauty, and notability? All is enjoyment and excitement, the one derived from the other, and both in perfection. Need we name the Great Horse Race?

It is but with three minutes, which is over-measure; of that splendid day, that we have to do. You have seen all the horses—they have cantered past you to the starting-place, and you know all their names, and their pedigrees, and their previous performances, and you have talked over their merits and demerits—Rookbury is vicious, for example, and Wilmslow is of good stock, but bad temper, and Carlyon has good backers, and may win—and so on. There is something to say about every name in the list. But the signal is given. They are off. The envied Garter of the turf is allotted. But to whom? The subdued roar runs on like wildfire—eyes are straining, hearts are fluttering, and thieves are snatching at forgotten watches. Lord Turfborough breathes so hard—why will he not open those tight white lips, and there is apoplexy in the family, too—the fates have settled the lodgings of Captain de Levant at Boulogne—and there is *that* in the dressing-case of Hugh Clarges which the wretched suicide of to-night has used lawfully for the last time. They come—they come. The ruck passes, and we can still note them all, and speculate on many a chance. But not *now*. Five or six clear themselves away from the main body, and henceforth, for that long age, that half minute of concentrated life, we see those, and those only. They fuse into a glistening group; knife-like whip and bloody spur are working fiercely; another moment, and all is over. Lord Turfborough breathes like a Christian, the Captain remembers what a bore it is to be sea-sick, and Hugh Clarges, with a spasm of remorse, as he thinks of a pale, gentle wife, determines to spare her poor heart, for the first time, by destroying himself elsewhere than at

home, but, getting furiously mad with brandy, forgets his resolution.

Some five or six forms must now leave *our* ruck, and the rest, for the time, must be forgotten ; for the goal is not very far off.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

RETINGRATIO AMORIS.

BERNARD CARLYON had ample time, during his journey to Lily Nook, to review his position in regard to Miss Trevelyan. For the railway, as has been said, crossed the country at a considerable distance from that quiet corner of the world, and when he was dropped at the nearest station, he had some miles to get over as he might. And although not much more subject to the influence of external things than the average of men at his age, he was not much comforted and encouraged by the weary jog-trot of the provincial conveyance which bore him to Lilian. As he crawled along a dusty road, which alternately appeared to him interminable and provokingly short, he reflected, perhaps more seriously than he had compelled himself to do before, upon the rather unfavourable light in which he must, up to that time, stand with the young lady. He had, of course (who has not?) much faith in his own oratorical powers, but as he grew nearer and nearer to the scene where they must be exercised, they, by some agency, seemed to him to become less and less respectable, while the facts against which he felt that he had to contend grew more solid and grim. He was convinced that the priest's unfriendly disposition towards him, of which, notwithstanding Heywood's apparent frankness and familiarity of tone, Carlyon was instinctively assured would have done its worst with Miss Trevelyan, and, unluckily, circumstances had enabled the priest to say a good deal. There was that particularly awkward scene with Mary Maynard, whom Heywood had found in the very arms of Carlyon. This might be explained away to a certain extent, although the story would be a lame one at the best, and it might be difficult to make a delicate nature, like that of Miss Trevelyan, quite comprehend *that it was possible* for a young lady, moving in decent society,

to fling herself so literally at a young gentleman's head as Miss Maynard had been pleased to do in the case of Bernard. Still this might be got over, by dint of indignation at being suspected, and of passionate eloquence. But what was to be said about the actress? Carlyon's conscience acquitted him—or at least discharged him with a Scottish verdict of "not proven,"—in the Maynard affair; but he could, by no process of sophism, blind himself to the truth, that he had been carrying on a long and most unhesitating flirtation with the rosy-mouthed Baby Waring, in season and out of season, and that he had crowned it by presenting himself before Lilian in the full flush of his author's triumph, and with the fascinating little actress on his arm, the chosen companion of his hour of exultation. These reflections, presented in all the varieties an ingenious mind could suggest, made the cross-country ride peculiarly agreeable to Bernard Carlyon.

Still he had determined to see Lilian, and he had acted upon that determination the moment he had obtained a clue to her residence. He had been bewildered by the meeting outside the theatre, an encounter which followed so closely upon the excitement of his success, as to confuse, in some measure, his usually rapid perceptions, and to delay his obtaining an interview. For he should, as he told himself at least five thousand times, have instantly followed the carriage, and ascertained Lilian's address, but the suddenness of the meeting, and the sensations it called up, for once deprived Carlyon of his presence of mind, and the chance was gone before he remembered that he should have seized it. Baby Waring justly complained of his alternate silence and forced loquacity during that evening's supper, and had a good cry about the coldness with which he took leave of her at her own door, without a word about seeing her again. But that pretty young lady's troubles were slight compared with those of Bernard during the next few days, and until, by dint of extreme watchfulness, he caught sight of the priest in St. Alban's Place, and was apprised by him one evening, in answer to a point-blank question, that Miss Trevelyan and her uncle were at Lily Nook. Nor had Bernard been much reassured by the priest's manner at that interview. He had not invited Carlyon to come down, nor had he made the slightest allusion to the one topic which Heywood knew was agitating

the young Secretary, but had talked in his usual keen and scoffing way upon the ordinary subjects of the hour. And—we are strange medleys—the lover, even then, could find time to remember that the author was slighted—not a syllable did Mr. Heywood say about the new piece, though every newspaper (except one, whose critic, being an early friend of Carlyon's, naturally grudged him every step up the ladder) had, by cordial eulogy, placed *Love, Honour, and Obey*, among the current matters of town talk.

But Bernard had obtained Lilian's address, and down he went early in the following morning to Lily Nook. He reached it at last, and a glance at the scene we have described told him that he had been directed rightly. As he was giving his card to the domestic, Lilian herself appeared at the French window, and her little foot was on the grass before she perceived Carlyon. A moment, and he was by her side—his heart most unwarrantably throbbing with a conviction that he was all but forgiven, a deduction which he hastily drew from the flush which overspread the beautiful face of Miss Trevelyan, at his greeting.

He took her hand. She did not withhold it, and he felt that his pardon was sealed.

Not so fast, young Secretary.

Lilian did not withdraw her hand, but its pressure upon Carlyon's was so faint as to be unfelt even by the sensitive nerves of a lover. And she did not re-enter the house by the window—bidding him to follow her—there would have been, in so slight an act, something of playfulness and familiarity, which he missed—but she remained upon the grassplot, and calmly expressed a regret that her uncle was too unwell to see a visitor. She was actually polite, and Carlyon was naturally enraged, as he had a right to be.

"My visit is to you, Lilian," he said gravely, and with some surprise in his tone. "Surely I am not to suppose it unwelcome?" A stupid speech—and yet not so stupid, because it afforded her a ready answer, and you should never make unanswerable speeches to people whom you love.

"You have a right to a welcome from any of us," said Miss Trevelyan, "and you know it well. We do not forget services *in the time of need*. Will you walk into the house?"

"If you please," said Carlyon, for he was now determined to

persevere, and he saw that the servant waited—a very little hesitation, and he would have been on the other side of the gate, and he felt this. O! he could follow her through the window into the drawing-room now, and not gather the slightest comfort from such guidance. And Lilian took her seat very calmly, and he imitated her; except in the calmness. They were alone together for the first time since they had parted at Lynfield—with a kiss. Just then it seemed impossible to Bernard that he could ever have kissed her.

“Lilian,” said Bernard, “is it thus that we should meet?”

“No,” replied Miss Trevelyan, “we ought not to have met. But though it has been your will that we should do so, and you have a right to dictate, perhaps you will try—I mean perhaps you will consent to make our interview as little painful as possible.” She spoke with a constraint which could not be mistaken.

“I hear your voice, Lilian, but not your words,” said Bernard, springing to his feet. “That cold sentence is not yours, but is dictated by an enemy—our enemy. Rights—I have no rights—yes,—I *have* the right to ask from you that at least you shall speak your own language. I am here to bear any displeasure, to atone for any offence, but I do claim that you censure me, that you condemn me—I will not be answered by another.”

“Displeasure—censure!” said Lilian, fixing her blue eyes upon him, with an effort; “why should we have to speak of such things?” she added, mildly.

“Ah! you are well schooled, Lilian, too well,” he replied, with warmth; “but this must not, shall not be. I have hurried to you the instant that I could discover your retreat, and I have come in all the sincerity which I know, yes, which I see you feel is in my heart, to open that heart to you once more, to implore you to listen to me, to supplicate pardon, and, if you will, penance; but even at your feet I *will* demand that your own heart shall speak. I will not be tortured by language taught you by a priest. Speak to me, Lilian; I entreat you to speak to me as you spoke when a word from you became the inspiration of my life, when you held out a hope which opened a world to me. Lilian, I must hear *you*.” And he took her unresisting hand—but again it answered with no pressure.

"Bernard,"—she began, and his heart leaped at hearing his name from her lips, "we have a painful task before us—do not let us add to its bitterness. All that has passed must be forgotten—we must now strive to forget one another. I hoped that we should have understood this without such a meeting."

Carlyon's heart should have sunk within him at this announcement, but it came almost harmlessly. So intense a feeling that an impossibility was proposed to him, a thing that was so monstrous in its injustice and cruelty, that it was not in destiny to enforce it—that his spirit rebelled, and the words passed as if unspoken. He knelt by her side, and with an earnestness of passionate expression, of which an hour before he would have deemed himself incapable, he poured out remonstrance, entreaty, protestation, with the fervour of one who believes in his soul that he is not pleading in vain. Nor was he, so far as his object could be obtained by utterly destroying the calmness with which Lilian had begun their interview. Her agitation became great, the tears flowed out fast from her eyes, but the only words she uttered, the only gestures she made, were those of dissuasion—she begged him to be silent—to rise—to listen. At length, while renewing his declaration of unaltered love, Bernard drew from his neck the chain which he had never ceased to wear since the hour of its gift, and besought her to remember that hour, and the yet dearer one when he gained the right to retain it. And as the little cross met her eye, poor Lilian's resolution gave way, and the next moment she was sobbing upon the breast of her lover. He thought that the fight was won, but he was again in error.

"I am forgiven?" he whispered, after a long pause, a happy one to him.

"I have nothing to forgive," said Lilian, still shaken by her emotion. "Why do you speak of my forgiveness? It is you who must pardon me."

"You, Lilian!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," said the beautiful girl, gently extricating herself from his arms; "I do not think it can be wrong to ask your forgiveness for causing you pain, although I am but doing my duty, and doing it," she added, "so weakly."

"You mean, dearest one," said Bernard, "that in receiving *me* coldly and with displeasure, you were justly rebuking

my conduct. It was so, indeed ; but may we not forget that now?"

"What conduct, Bernard?" said Lilian, looking up to him with that frank manner which made one of her principal charms, and which now sent the blood to the very forehead of Carlyon ; "I have never had cause to complain of you."

"You have never," he repeated slowly—and then a deadly chill came over him, a sensation to which the bitterest reproaches would have brought a relief. "One word, Lilian—a short one. You have heard—you have been told nothing which should injure your regard for me?"

"Not one word, Bernard ; not one." And there was no doubting the truth of those accents.

"And yet," he said, almost gasping, "you receive me with coldness ; you turned away when we met on the railway ; to-day you have spoken of our forgetting one another. Why—what is this mystery?"

"Bernard," she said, with a sort of hysteric cry, partly of surprise, partly of sorrow, "has it not been explained to you? Whose cruelty sent you here?"

"Nay, nay, answer me, answer me," said Bernard, in a fierce, hoarse whisper—"what is this?"

"You do not know that I take the veil?" said Lilian, trembling from head to foot. "He pledged himself to tell you as gently as—Oh ! this was a hard, a cruel thing to do. But it is true, Bernard."

Carlyon's lips grew white as ashes, and his eyes seemed to him as if they would set and glaze, but for an incessant effort to preserve their sense. He gazed on Lilian with a look of such intentness as almost to cause her terror. Then, with a short, wild laugh, he said almost in a jesting tone—

"No, Lilian, no—you take no veil. Indeed you cannot," he added, in a tone of strange calmness, and as if he were speaking of an ordinary occurrence of life. "You have given me your promise, and it is sacred. We will not speak of the possibility of its being broken."

"That promise was given," said Lilian, sadly, "when—when we were rash, and did not see that we were departing from the path of duty."

"Again," said Bernard, quickly, "again I hear sentiments

which have been forced upon you by an evil adviser, henceforth my enemy. Why, dearest Lilian, are you lending yourself to do the will of this scheming, heartless man? You had learned to repose your best faith and trust in me; you could write me the strongest and sweetest assurances of your love, yet I find you, as you own, without cause, changed to me, and meditating a cruel and an unhallowed sacrifice, at the bidding of a man who is either the wretched tool of a system, or one who is yet more miserable in his envy of the happiness of others."

"Do not speak of him," said Lilian. "Our duty is prescribed for us by Heaven, and man, though he may point it out, and urge us all to fulfil it, is not to be blamed, whatever pain may be occasioned by the teaching."

"You could not tell me more plainly," said Carlyon, "what kind of teaching has been practised upon you, dear Lilian. It is well indeed that we have met before it was too late. Now, as your affianced husband, I am here to rescue you from this tangle of selfishness and priestcraft. Is it possible, dear one, that you can be deluded by the artifices around you? To what fortunate convent is the wealth of Mr. Heywood's pupil to be given over, or does it go to the order of which he is so worthy a member?"

Lilian looked at him reproachfully for a moment.

"Dearest," he said, smiling, "I understand you to reprove me for that Protestant suspicion—you remind me of your own creed. God forbid that I should utter a word to pain you. Your creed, be it what it may, is mine—I will believe what I can, and take the rest for your sake. But your church and those who trade upon her name, are two, and in this you must let me be your guide. Heywood's objects are of the world, worldly, and he would condemn your life to stagnate in the routine of a convent, that your fortune may fall into the hands for which he works."

"My fortune, Bernard!" said Lilian, "that would be a poor prize. It matters little now, but in other times,"—she hesitated, and a faint blush rose to her cheek,—"I ought to have told you that I was no heiress—there was some idle plan by which you were to make me one, but that is all over."

"And you have no fortune, Lilian?"

"None; indeed I am almost a dependent. So you acquit *those whom you have suspected*, do you not?"

"No," said Bernard, who was not in a mood to relinquish his suspicions, "on the contrary, I suspect them of a deeper game than I had imagined. But you make me happier by what you tell me."

"That I am poor? And suppose," said Lilian, recurring, despite herself, to the scenes at Lynfield, "suppose that it had not been so, and that I had been rich. Would that have made any difference to you, Bernard?"

"When I look at you, I feel that it would not, Lilian, and that I could bear to be thought and called a fortune-hunter for your sake. But I am far more rejoiced to learn that you are without fortune, for I feel that between me and the happiness I have set before me are many obstacles, which would be greatly increased by your being an heiress. There is a selfish speech for you, dear Lilian, but you will forgive it?"

"Such speeches must be forgiven and forgotten, Bernard, and not renewed," said Miss Trevelyan. "I have told you thus much, in order to prevent your continuing to think unjustly of those who deserve better thoughts. Now we must part, and—why should I disguise it, the parting will be very bitter, for it is parting to meet no more. But so it must be."

"Lilian," said Carlyon, very earnestly, "we shall part, but it *will* be to meet again. For you love me, Lilian."

She looked up imploringly, and with her blue eyes swimming in tears, she tried to speak, but in vain.

"Yes," he said almost exultingly, "you love me, and in that faith I defy all the treachery of which I now see the signs and traces. A new light has broken upon me, and I have a key to the workings of those who would keep you from me. I shall defeat them, because you are true. You will enter no convent, let priests plot round you as they will, and one day you will be my wife."

Lilian's bright hair glistened in the sunshine, as she shook her head mournfully.

"They may train and school you, Lilian, but your heart is true to me. I came down hither, fearing that malice might have been busy with my name, and that you had been taught to doubt me. It was a shallow and unworthy thought of mine, and for that indeed I beg your forgiveness, for I should have known your noble nature better. They did who craftily abstained from

such a course. But in future I will have no fear—you will be true to me—and while I am rendering myself worthy of the highest happiness earth or heaven can give me, I shall have your sympathies and your prayers. Do not answer me, darling; it may be that you have been urged, or even have promised to persevere in language which is not your own, but satisfy your conscience, dearest, that you have done all that was required, and tell your heart that such language fell harmless. You love me, Lilian, and one day you will be mine."

He pressed her to his heart, and heard that her lips were whispering one of the prayers of the church. As she ceased, he said in a low voice,

"For strength, dear one, if you will, but not for forgiveness—the saints to whom you pray have needed it more than you."

"Oh, Bernard!" she said, pressing his hand convulsively, "I am very, very wicked to listen to you."

"The wickedness is with those who have dared to teach you that which thus agitates you, my own Lilian. I would give years of life at once to extricate you from their influence, but if I ask you to bear with the present, it is only that I may prepare a brighter future for you. And, my heart's love, if it were not that I have so firm and abiding a trust in your promise that I were ashamed to seek a formal vow, I would secure you against all their wiles and snares, by asking you at once to become my wife in the sight of the world—but I can trust your courage while I am battling with the world for your sake."

Twice Lilian attempted to reply through her tears, but a mental struggle seemed to check her utterance. Then her face brightened, a smile came to her lip, and a flush to her brow, as she said,

"Trust me."

They spoke no more of their love that day, not even as they wandered among the trees, and watched the water-lilies heaving, and the air-bells bubbling up as the large leaves fell lazily back upon the stream. But it was in the excess of their happiness that they talked of the idlest trifles, and perhaps their hearts spoke even more freely through those long pauses of silence, nor even ceased to speak together long after Bernard and Lilian had parted.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A PANNIER FULL OF OLD DEMONS.



R. PAUL CHEQUERBENT, as has been said, was delivered from durance, through the final aid of Carlyon. He had also gone back to Mr. Molesworth's offices, where he was received by his principal in a careless, forgiving sort of way, Molesworth evidently regarding him as a good-natured *vaurien*, whom he should probably have hastened to get rid of, but for Paul's valuable relations. On the whole, Mr. Chequerbent was not very cheerfully welcomed on his return from the Hotel Jerusalem.

But he could have easily borne that. He had a graver sorrow, and one with which the pretty actress was connected. From the time of her being claimed by Lord Rookbury as his daughter, Paul had grown thoughtful, and it became clear to himself, as it had long been to his friends, that he entertained for Angela a much tenderer regard than he would, in his harmless libertinism of tongue, cared to allow. He had fancied himself a gay young fellow, amusing himself with a theatrical flirtation, and awoke to find that the flirtation was something earnest, and that its being broken off would render him miserable. This conviction began to keep even Paul awake at nights, and gave him palpitations of the heart when he suddenly looked back to any of the pleasant days he had spent with Angela. It literally drove him to attend to business in order to drown thought, and, to his own astonishment no less than that of his employers, he acquitted himself in two or three small matters very well, and obtained Molesworth's gracious recognition of one of his exploits.

"Well, Mr. Chequerbent, you needn't wait. I don't see that you have blundered this in any way," a saying which Paul duly treasured up in his memory, to be avenged at leisure.

His finances were rather slender, just then, and he frequented restaurants of a much humbler description than those in which, when richer, he had delighted to recreate himself. One evening he had somewhat hastily dived into the haunt which he had

just then adopted—hastily, because he had not even yet been able to divest himself of the idea that London had its eye upon him, and it was rather a compromise of dignity to dine at the “Glaswegian Fortress,” where a curious interview took place.

The Fortress is not strictly a fashionable resort. It is situated in a crowded thoroughfare, but its front is not imposing, being simply that of a narrow public-house. Nor is there invitation in its sounds; for enter, and there is a bar, whence fluids of various kinds are continually administered to cabmen, labourers, and a mixed general group, among which the unclean-looking small retailer, hurrying in for his daily dram, looks almost distinguished. There is a good deal of noise—heavy voices indulge in that gruff iteration and reiteration, so dear to the inferior classes, and there is no unfrequent appeal to “Miss” for a light for the pipe of clay. A passage at one side leads to the inner room, and even this passage is invaded by the lounging navigator, or by braces of tradesmen, who take hasty glasses together, toasting, by a toss back of the head, the business which has brought them together, and, without a smile, continuing their discussion as to “the party.” They make way for you, certainly, but look rather insulted that you wish to come in, and look after you, as if to be assured that you are not their debtor, whom it might be well to dun. Push on, however, and force a door, and find yourself in a long, narrow, dingy room, with skylights over one side, and the place divided into boxes, duly curtained. There is sand upon the floor, and a plentiful presence of those articles into one of which the American gentleman said, remonstratingly, that he should really be obliged to expectorate, if the servant did not abstain from thrusting it near him during his chew. But the table-clothes are very white, and the meats are admirable, and cooked admirably, and the liquors have a reputation; and if any body, by any possibility, should ever desire to see the *Glaswegian Advertiser*, or other of those vast northern journals, four of which would cover Lincoln’s-Inn-Fields, he may indulge his eccentricity at the Fortress. Hither come respectable traders of the vicinity, a few lawyers, and that remarkable class called “witnesses,” who, by virtue of having to depose to certain facts, or fictions, do for the time clothe themselves with the whole dignity of the law, and shout, stare, swagger, and swear, until such dis-

tion and the liquor are too much for them, and the witnesses only give evidence of intoxication.

Mr. Chequerbent had retired to this unpretending refectory one evening, and, having duly administered to the wants of exhausted nature (who found herself materially revived by a series of splendid chops, for the like of which the clubman with all his silver forks, and his *serviettes*, and his finger-glasses, might sigh in vain), was reading the "advertisement half" of a newspaper over and over, until the "inside," with the leaders and theatrical criticisms, should be disengaged. The gentleman with the coveted portion of the journal was a slow student, and Paul grew rather irritable, as he observed him, after going carefully through the debate in Parliament, begin it again, folding up the paper doggedly, and setting himself resolutely to understand what that finance discussion was really about.

"Stupid blockhead!" muttered Paul, "why don't he take yesterday's paper? It would be quite new enough for such a donkey."

"Here is to-day's, Sir," said a voice, "and quite at your service."

The speaker was a fine-looking man, as even Paul himself admitted. He was in a box opposite to Mr. Chequerbent's, and handed the paper across, with a smile which might be held as an apology for answering Paul's self-communing.

"This is your own private newspaper, I think, Sir," said Mr. Chequerbent, who was always very polite in dialogue, though his monologues were sometimes personal. "Pray do not let me trespass on your courtesy."

"You are perfectly welcome to it," said the stranger, "and if I should go before you have mastered all its wisdom, give it to our common friend, Bernard Carlyon, for me."

"Ah! you know Carlyon. A fine fellow, is he not?" said Paul.

"He is," said the other, "and a successful fellow, and deserves to be so, for his perseverance."

"Perseverance is a grand thing," said Paul, who had been so awed by its grandeur throughout life, that he had never been familiar with it. "When did you see Bernard Carlyon?"

"Last night. I rather think he is gone down to a place of mine in the country to-day. He will be quite at home, though I am not there to receive him."

"He finds friends everywhere," said Mr. Chequerbent.

"So may anybody," said the stranger, "who will make them. As a rule, I find people very well inclined to me, so long as I wish it, and they must be in a deuce of a hurry if they are tired of the acquaintance first."

There was a cynical ill-nature about this speech which pleased Paul, and he determined to remember it for his own use—meantime he had to show himself worthy to have such brilliant epigrams said to him, so he replied,

"Easier to make friends than to keep them, eh?"

"Some people find it so. What a draught there is from this skylight. I will finish my wine at your table, if you'll let me," he added, changing his seat. "But don't let me interrupt your political studies."

"Oh!" said Paul, "I've read the debate, and I don't want to read what the newspaper editor can tell me about public questions."

"You are right. If you have read last night's debate, you *have* had all the editorial articles—of yesterday morning."

"Well," said Paul, "I suppose the members do cram from the press a good deal."

"Yes," said the other, "and if they would only say their lessons accurately, the discussions would not be so helpless as they are, generally speaking. I suppose, by the way, that your friend Carlyon means to get into Parliament some day?"

"I don't know how he means to manage it, then," said Paul, "for, although he is in comfortable circumstances, I do not suppose that he has got any money to spend in bribery, and that sort of thing."

"Besides the grand entrance to the New Palace of Westminster," said the stranger, "there are side doors."

"I hardly know which you call the grand entrance," said the literal Paul, who did not understand his companion. "There's the Hall, and there's the Victoria Tower, and the Peers' entrance."

"That's the way Carlyon will go in," interrupted the stranger, smiling.

"How do you mean?" said Paul. "Does he turn out to be the—he was always rather mysterious—but you are joking."

The stranger laughed just so heartily as not to displease Paul, and replied,

"The heir to a peerage? No, no—at least, not so far as I know; for you, Mr. Chequerbent, are more intimate with him than myself."

"You know my name—I was going to ask you where we had met."

"I saw you in Cursitor Street, with another acquaintance of mine, Mr. Kether, and we had some slight introduction; but you had important business to attend to, and were in a hurry—I dare say you scarcely noticed me—my name is Heywood."

Paul did not look altogether comfortable at this, and Heywood saw it.

"Kether afterwards told me your business there, which was an errand of kindness—to assist some poor little clerk who had got himself locked up. I hope you succeeded in ultimately releasing him."

Mr. Chequerbent's conscience struck him. Poor little Mooter, to aid whom he had made so many vows when they were fellow-captives, but whom he had forgotten, as the chief butler did Joseph. But he inwardly applauded Kether's tact in telling Mr. Heywood such a falsehood, applause which, as it happened, Mr. Leon Kether had done nothing to earn.

"We shall, I hope, manage the poor little fellow's affair," said Paul hastily, "but he has been very indiscreet, and reposed trust where he should not have placed it. I need not tell a man of the world," added Paul, with his best air of shrewdness, "what that sort of folly comes to."

"Ha!" replied the other, humouring Paul's affectation. "But we were speaking of Carlyon. I was just going to say, for don't let me give you a false impression about him, that it is not as the son of a peer that I suppose he will enter Parliament. However, you are pretty near the mark, for I conclude that it will be as a peer's son-in-law."

"The deuce," said Paul. "He never told me that."

"Well, in that case," said Heywood, "I have no right, perhaps, to speak, but if I rely on your discretion, I know that you will not get me into trouble. Hear it from himself, please, not from me—you understand."

"Certainly," said Paul; "but you have not told me what peer it is."

"Has he so large an acquaintance among the aristocracy,

then, that you can be in much doubt? Did you not go down with him into the country where his noble friend lives?"

"Do you mean to Aspen Court? No, I did not go there; I had an important engagement at the time" (so our Paul described Mrs. Sellinger's ball and the police-cell) "and I was obliged to remain in town. But his noble friend! why, they have not been and made old Wilmslow a lord!"

"You seem to have a hankering for new creations," said Heywood, laughing. "But why need we make peers while Lord Rookbury is extant?"

"Lord Rookbury!" exclaimed Paul. "But he has no daughters."

"It is not material to the purpose that he should have more than one, and that solitary happiness he has certainly attained, as you know better than most people."

Poor Paul's heart gave a great beat, and he became very white, and then gulped a huge mouthful of mahogany-coloured brandy and water, and then tried to laugh. "A whole pannier full of old devils," to adopt the phrase of Alcofribas, was suddenly upset into his system, and they would have gone to work on the instant, but that a comforting thought occurred to him, and they had to be quiet for a minute.

"O, yes," he said, with an exceedingly miserable smile, decidedly made by distortion, and not by pleasure, "Lord Rookbury has lately discovered and claimed a daughter, under very romantic circumstances. She had been neglected, it seems."

"The romance, though, was in the atonement for the neglect," said Heywood. "Such neglect itself, I fancy, is common enough among gentlemen who happen to be so organized as not to be fond of children."

"He will, of course, provide for her in some way," said Paul.

"I should rather imagine he would," said the other, "and nobly, for it is not one of Lord Rookbury's particularly numerous vices to ill-treat his family. The young lady is a prize worth carrying off, and I wish the gallant Bernard all happiness."

Paul did not look as if he wished the gallant Bernard anything of the kind.

"Why," he said, "I know her well, and she is a very good and charming girl; but when you speak of a prize, in a worldly way,

I don't know that the fortune of a natural daughter will be any such great matter."

"A natural daughter!" repeated Heywood; "my dear Sir, don't you know better than that?"

"Better than what?" said Paul, angrily; and indeed he felt himself within an ace of bursting out very rudely indeed. "How do you mean, better?"

"You are an intimate friend of the lady, I believe," said Heywood, with a studied tone of deference. "You seem, or choose to seem, ignorant of certain circumstances,—I am hardly aware whether I should be serving her interests by saying what you, of all persons should know, without my information."

"So you should," whispered one of the demons to Paul, who immediately conceived wrath against poor little Angela for keeping secrets from him. But he was too much in earnest not to go on.

"I *am*," he said, "very sincerely interested in Miss Livingstone, and I should be delighted to hear of her welfare; why I have not heard of it I do not know, but you may rely upon my discretion, as you said just now."

"Then," said Heywood, "is it possible that you do not know that you have no longer any right to call her Miss Livingstone?"

"Is—*is* she married already?" said poor Paul, in a high voice, and with his eyes opened to an owl's stare. How he showed his whole hand to Heywood! if that player had needed to look over the cards.

"No, not yet," said Heywood, affecting not to notice the other's agitation; "and what Carlyon's rapidity as a wooer may be, remains to be seen. But, in the meantime, if you have any aristocratic friends who happen to be the younger sons of Marquesses, you can inform them that the lady who was Miss Livingstone now takes precedence over their wives."

"I don't understand," said Paul, so piteously, that he ought to have softened his tormentor.

"She is an Earl's daughter, Sir, and will be known, until Mr. Carlyon's pleasure to the contrary be signified, as the Lady Anna Rookton. She was originally christened Anne, it seems, so they have reverted to that name, a little dignified, and have thrown over the playbill-pretty of Angela, which I think shows good taste."

"Do you mean to say," asked Paul, writhing on the hard carpeted bench, "that she is the Earl's legitimate child, and going to be acknowledged?"

"It appears," said Heywood, "that almost instantly after the death of the first Lady Rookbury, who had been a widow, and by whom there is one child, Lord Dawton,—the Earl found a second. It *is* said that the lady was of humble birth, but of proud virtue, or there would have been no marriage in the case. As to her early death, and the accidental mislaying of the young person who was the result of the union, there are various stories, and I should not very much wonder if you knew more about them than I do. But by-gones are to be by-gones, I hear, and Miss Livingstone, as aforesaid, is to be Lady Anna Rookton, until your friend makes her Lady Anna Carlyon, which is as pretty a couple of names as you will find in the peerage."

"By Heaven!" cried Paul, dashing his hand furiously upon the table, and making the glasses ring and the audience stare, "I knew nothing about this." He was going to cry, but he swallowed down his emotions (if his gestures were an exponent of the process), and added in a vicious manner, and with elaborate articulation of all four words,—

"Very well. Never mind."

"I hope, my dear Sir," said Mr. Heywood, "that I have not been the innocent cause of exciting any displeasure in you against the lady or your friend."

"Oh—no—not at all—not at all," said Paul, with a forced calmness.

"And I know it is needless to remind you, that what I have said is strictly between ourselves."

"Oh, of course," said Paul, snappingly. "But the recognition will be no secret, I suppose. What your precious lords do is proclaimed in the servile press to all the toadeaters of the country." Thus it will be seen that private wrong converted even the aristocratic Paul into a furious democrat.

"Not at present," said Heywood. "In fact, the Earl, for reasons of his own, wishes the affair kept as quiet as possible until Lord Dawton comes of age; and although the foolery of that manager, Phosphor, made the matter town-talk at the moment, it has blown over now, and there is to be no new publicity. So you will see that you will oblige your friend, Lady

Anna, by knowing nothing but what you are told by her. I have, of course," he reiterated, "your promise not to mention me—your promise as a high-bred gentleman, as well as a man of the world."

Those two epithets were too much for Paul, even in his affliction, and he actually put his hand into his tormentor's in sign of good faith. Heywood pressed it cordially.

"You must not be offended," he said, in a kindly voice, "if I say another word; for your manifestation of feeling, which it would be impossible to overlook, affects me. I am a much older man than yourself, and one whose vocation it is to advise and console. You look at my costume; but *cucullus non facit monachum*, you know."

Paul did not know anything of the sort, or what the words meant; nor did he much care just then, for he was very miserable.

"I am a clergyman; but not one of those spiritual surgeons who refuse to look at certain wounds, and only call them bad names. It is evident to me that you have been grieved by what I have told you, and that you deem yourself wronged by one or both of your friends."

"Oh, wronged! No: certainly not wronged. Who am I? People have a right to kick away old friends when they please, I suppose," jerked out Paul, who between grief, rage, and mahogany-coloured brandy-and-water, was getting reckless, and I do not believe that even the Temperance Orator, Mr. Gong himself, could have orationed him out of ordering another huge steaming potion. Heywood did not try, remembering, of course, that Rome does not deny brandy to the laity.

"Certainly, my dear friend—if you will permit me to call you so. If we had not that right, the world would be very disagreeable. But there are kindnesses which should not be forgotten, and you know best whether you have done them to either Lady Anna or Mr. Carlyon."

"Why, Carlyon would never have had his play out, and made such a reputation, but for me," cried Paul. Let us lay this curious mode of stating the case to the brandy, recollecting that it was certainly the fact, inasmuch as Bernard put his play on the stage to pay Paul's debts. "And as for Angela," he continued, "for I'm not going to call her Lady Anna, so you

need not ask me to do it, and there's an end—no, there is not an end. The money I've spent in taking that girl out on the water and to dinners, and the things I have given her"—and he mused, and made a great A on the table with some of the liquor that was spilt, and then he wiped it out indignantly, with his sleeve.

"Ingratitude is the common lot," said Heywood.

"Yes, but Angy and Carlyon were not a common lot," said Paul, making a jest which even his misery could hardly excuse. "They were two people, whom I had put my confidence into—in, I mean," he added, for the ends of his speech were losing their precision.

"But," said Heywood, "might I ask what very great harm they have done you? It is my duty not to let strife be stirred up without a cause. Lady Anna—you will allow *me* to call her so—has hitherto, in obedience to her father, probably, delayed to tell you the news, but you have known her a long time, and cannot think that she would willingly act unkindly."

"You are right," said Paul, "you are a true comforter; and if all the parsons were like you—but that's neither here nor there. Of course, you are right, that's the key to the whole affair; she is a good, dear girl, and I should like to hear anybody say she is not."

"I should not," said Heywood, quietly. "And then, Carlyon, as Lady Anna's lover, could not do otherwise than——"

Such a bang upon the table!

"He her lover! He! Who's Carlyon? Who's he! Why should he call himself her lover? What right has he to do it? Carlyon her lover! Carlyon be ——."

"My dear Sir," Heywood said, "calm your excitement, because it can do you no good, and may do you harm. Lady Anna, or Miss Angela, if you will, would regret that you made her name the subject of loud talk in a public tavern."

Paul was instantly brought down to an intense whisper, in which, and with hideous grimaces, he apprised Heywood, leaning over to his ear to be sure he was heard, that Bernard Carlyon was an incarnate fiend.

"But," added Paul, louder, and for the general information of the room, "a perfect genlam an a damlibral flo." But only the *pen of Percival Leigh* could do justice to our friend's later

speeches. The brandy and the excitement had done their work, and Paul became bland, and smiling, and what is called by tragedians kee-alm, quite kee-alm.

"Of all stupid habits, that of getting tipsy is the most foolish," moralised the priest, throwing back his curls from his noble forehead. "One is useful neither for good nor for harm, not to mention indigestion. On the whole, I am glad that my failings did not take that direction. I should not like anybody to see my eyes gazing at the cigar lamp in the way that fellow's are fixed. Decidedly, drunkenness is a mistake." And the splendid violet eyes of which he had spoken looked steadily and contemptuously on the face of the helpless Paul, who was certainly in a very advanced stage of mooniness. Yet, all things considered, it might be a question which of the two were the most satisfactory spectacle to any higher Intelligence just then passing by—the finely gifted man, who, with a view to ultimate mischief, had been condescending to torment a foolish boy—or that boy himself, who had only yielded to the torment and drunk himself insensible to end all other evils. We will not strike a balance, the less that Mr. Heywood, finding Paul incapable of taking care of himself, good-naturedly took him away to St. Alban's Place. The monks were always hospitable.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

PAUL IN A NEW CHARACTER.



T is probable that when Heywood opened the conversation with Mr. Paul Chequerbent, which concluded in the disastrous manner recorded in our last chapter, the priest had not arranged any specific plan for rendering that excitable young gentleman useful in the prosecution of certain designs Heywood had in view, and which by no means tended towards the comfort of Bernard Carlyon. But Paul unbosomed himself with so much facility, and indicated with so much unconscious precision the chord which required touching, that before Heywood resolved to take him home to St. Alban's Place, he had quite determined what work he would set him to do. And the following morning, while tempting Paul's not over-eager appetite with divers stimulating delicacies, of

which the priest was an exceedingly good judge, he broke ground without much preliminary.

"Reverting to our little talk last night, Mr. Chequerbent," said the priest, busying himself with some of the breakfast arrangements, in order to let Paul get over any embarrassment which recollections might occasion, "I suppose that you and Bernard Carlyon are intimate friends, and in one another's confidence?"

"Why no," said Paul, "I can't say that. It seems odd that we are not more intimate, all things considered; but Carlyon had always a sort of mystery about him, or I fancied so, and you might go on telling him *your* history, and your troubles, and your love affairs, and all the rest of it, for hours, and he would listen, and give you advice if you wanted it, but he never told *you* anything in return."

"There might have been good reasons for that," said Heywood, significantly.

"I've thought so too," said Mr. Chequerbent, "at times. But, if there is anything wrong, he has managed to keep it very close; and you see he gets into first-rate society, and is asked to stay at great people's houses, and altogether one does not know what to think of him. But what you told me last night, and which seems like a dream to-day, has opened my eyes in a great measure."

"And do you intend to make any use of your enlightenment?" said Heywood. "Here, let me give you some hot coffee—try that devil—or do you propose to resign to him a young lady who, it appears to me, is almost worth looking after, unless you have other views."

"What I am going to tell you is in perfect confidence, Mr. Heywood. I have formed a great respect for you, and I shall be very glad of your advice. I—you would not perhaps believe it—but my affection for that young lady is very warm and very sincere, and I received a great shock in learning that she was Lord Rookbury's daughter, and a much greater one in finding that she was legitimate."

"Two circumstances, my dear friend, which one would have supposed were in your favour. Would you have preferred her remaining an actress, and being condemned all her life to *paint her face*, and exhibit her ankles, for the delectation of

any snob who could find sixpence to pay half-price to a gallery?"

"That is one way of putting it," said Paul, discontentedly. "An artist's life—"

"My dear Chequerbent, don't talk nonsense. The way I have put it is the way society puts it, behind the backs of artists, as you call them. Is that the life you would select for a girl whom you cared about?"

Paul remembered many pleasant days which he had spent with Angela while she was fulfilling her engagements, and he grumbly admitted that the stage had its humiliations, but also its triumphs. The priest was obstinate, and would not even allow that the triumphs were worth having, the highest being the throwing an entire theatre into a paroxysm of admiration, which, from an ignorant mob, whereof the pit and gallery formed the overwhelming majority, was no compliment to an educated person.

"But," he said, "we are talking uselessly, because that part of the business is settled without us; and Lady Anna Rookton is not likely to have to curtsy to the plebeians in return for another 'reception'—is not that the word? Do you know when she leaves town?"

"No," said Paul. "That reminds me, though. A very good thought. I'll go and see her this very morning. Twelve o'clock, by Jove; how late we are!"

"You slept soundly," said Heywood, "and I thought it might do you no harm to have your sleep out. Pooh, pooh, don't look discomposed—the excitement of our conversation would have been enough to overset you, even if you had drunk nothing. I have seen a man talk himself into intoxication, over water. But what good do you propose to do by seeing Miss Livingstone?"

"Well," said Paul, "I should like to come to an understanding with her. To tell you the truth, we have been so intimate for a very long time, that I think she is using me confoundedly ill in encouraging any one else's attentions."

"Is it fair to ask you whether you ever came to an understanding before, and when she was what you are pleased to call an artist?" said the priest, maliciously. "Or, in plain English, did you ever tell her, or even admit to yourself that you intended

to marry her? Come," he added, laughing, "you are in the confessional."

"If you put it so," said Paul, "I certainly have no right to say that I ever exactly proposed to her. But, bless my soul, I was always in her company; I have written her heaps of letters, I've got some of her hair in my purse here, I have taken her out to hundreds of dinners, and I believe that I should have a good action for breach of promise against her."

"I should like to have brought up all that evidence against you, if the case had been the other way, and you had deserted her. How you would have thrown up your head, and blessed your soul then, and wondered, by Jove! what such girls were made of to fancy that because a gentleman paid them some attention, they were to be a clog on him for life, and all that. I know you young fellows," said Heywood. "I do not believe that you can say, honestly, that you ever contemplated introducing that young lady to your guardian, or to your rich relations, the proud good old aunts in particular—in fact, you were very happy to flirt about with a pretty and amusing companion, but you thought as much of marriage as I do—I, a priest of Rome. Well, she is above that sort of thing now, and so you may go and look out for somebody else; there are plenty of other young ladies who like champagne and ice-pudding."

Paul's conscience told him that Heywood spoke the truth, but, (with our usual wisdom) he instantly began to seek to convince himself that as he had been sincerely attached to Angela, he should have proposed one day or another, and that he was therefore ill-treated, and he mumbled something of the kind, which made the priest laugh.

"Come, my dear friend," he said, "there is no use in self-deception. I know that you like her very much, and if I were to say that I know she is very fond of you, I should only say what I have reason to believe."

"*You* know that?" said Paul, colouring up to the roots of his hair with pleasure.

"I do not speak lightly on such matters," said Heywood, gravely. "I retain sufficient respect for my vocation not to sport with affairs involving human happiness or misery. But if *I* interfere, it must be on the condition that you are either *entirely* guided by my advice, or that you reject it altogether.

I should not interpose if I did not believe that I could be of material service."

"Anything in the world that you can point out," said Paul, earnestly, "I will try to do."

"Well, I am glad that you have so much confidence in my wish to serve you. And now answer a question or two which bear upon the business, though you may not see that they do. You are still, I believe, in the office of Molesworth and Penkridge?"

"M. and P. have still that honour," said Paul.

"But if I understood Carlyon aright, you do not attend much to business; in fact, you do not know much about it?"

"It was very good of him to say that," said Paul, angrily. "If I give my mind to work, I rather believe I can master it as well as some other people who think themselves deuced clever, but who don't make as many hits as they fancy, I can tell them. You have only to give me an *agenda*, as we call it, and I will be all obedience." For he had rapidly acquired a great and vague reverence of Heywood; and this had been increased since Paul had learned that he was a Catholic priest. He had some notion, I think, that the thunders of the Vatican, of which he had heard, but had a somewhat indefinite idea, were about to be set rolling for his especial benefit.

"Then I gather that you do attend to business," said the priest. "Are you much in communication with your employer?"

"The old Mole? Well, no, not more than I can help," said Paul, "for he is a cantankerous kind of party, and thinks, like Sir Peter Teazle, that it is a wicked world, and the fewer people we praise the better."

"And you like to be praised?" asked the priest, looking full into Paul's face.

"One likes to be appreciated, at any rate," said Paul; "and it is not in the old Mole's way to say much that is pleasant. But I know all that he is about, because I copy a good many of the entries out of his attendance-book into the bills of costs."

"Ah!" said Heywood; "do I understand that term rightly? The attendance-book is the record of what is done for clients."

"Not quite that," said Paul, delighted to be able to impart some information. "It is the book in which Molesworth puts

down, every day, a note as to whom he has seen, what letters he has written, and so forth, to be charged against the client."

"But he would put down nothing that all the establishment might not read, I suppose?" said Heywood, carelessly.

"Why," said Paul, "in strictness he ought not; and his course is decidedly irregular and dangerous, as I often tell him. But he has a habit of making notes of explanations, and reasons, and things to be remembered in future, which, of course, do not go into the bills—I should *rather* say not, or some people's weak minds would be astonished—but there they are. However, he has some sense, and he is very particular about having this book brought back to him the moment we have done with it; and the old ones he keeps locked up."

"Ah, in tin boxes with staring labels. I know them."

"Yes: but the box in question is kept locked up in our strong room," said Paul.

"Oh," said the priest, unconcernedly; "then I suppose there would be a difficulty in your looking back to any particular entry in one of these books?"

"A difficulty? Well, yes," said Paul, "because it would seem queer for me to be looking into a box like that. The other clerks might make observations; and I have more than one enemy who might take an opportunity of mentioning it to Molesworth."

"Carlyon's ingenuity, I suppose, would not have been so soon at fault," said Heywood.

"When I say that I do not see," said Paul, immediately brought up to the collar by this reminder, "I mean that I do not see at the moment. Of course the thing can be done."

"Well," said Heywood, "it is very desirable for your interests, as well as those of a certain young lady, that I should see a record of some transactions that took place in the course of a period which I can point out; and if Mr. Molesworth has given any of these notes, and explanations, and reasons, so much the better."

"And you desire me to copy them out for you?" said Paul.

"I had no idea of asking you to undertake that labour," said Heywood. "My notion was that if I could see them—an hour would answer my purpose—the object would be gained."

"You want me," said Paul, slowly and dubiously, "to get a

book out of M. and P.'s strong room, and bring it to you to look at?"

"Do not put it in that way, if you please, Mr. Chequerbent," said the priest, with a show of displeasure. "I do not *want* it; I have no concern in the matter. I supposed myself to be endeavouring to serve you; and if you think that I am not qualified to do so, pray let us drop the subject. It is not to be expected that I should feel more strongly for Miss Livingstone than a gentleman does who professes to love her."

"Don't be displeased," said Paul, "but just consider my position. You see I am, as an articulated clerk, a sort of confidential man; and the thing is rather a queer one to do."

"Don't do it," said Heywood, "and there's an end. Only, as you have, very properly, and I may say, in a way which increases my respect for your intellect, referred to your relation with your employer, I may remind you that you are bound to take a large view of your responsibilities. Remember that in attaching yourself to Mr. Molesworth, you merely complied with one of the forms necessary to bring you into that great system of equity which is represented by law; and that you are in effect a minister of justice. How far you have a right, simply from private feeling towards Mr. Molesworth, to abstain from any course which will promote the justice you have bound yourself to forward, is a matter for your own consideration."

This piece of sophistry was exactly calculated to please Paul, who immediately looked profound, and tried to catch the tone of the other.

"That, I allow," said Paul, "is a view to which I have not, perhaps, given sufficient attention. You feel certain that the interests of Miss Livingstone are involved in the course you propose."

"Most certainly," said Heywood.

"Then by Jove it's done, Sir," said Paul, relapsing into colloquiality.

"Perhaps I had better not ask how you mean to manage," said Heywood.

"Just so," said Paul. "Leave it to me. But I should like Angela to know that I am engaged in trying to serve her."

"If you will accept my advice, you will abstain from saying anything to her, or to anybody else, until the service is ac-

complished. Remember, women seldom give you credit for your intentions, if you fail. Success is a woman's idol."

"But in the words of Mrs. Macbeth," said Paul, "'I have screwed my courage to the sticking place,' and shall not fail. And now—who is the party whose business I am to refer to?"

"It seems to me," said the priest, "that it may be convenient and even advantageous hereafter, should you be unable to charge yourself with having, to your knowledge, given any information on the subject. If you bring me the book containing the record of Mr. Molesworth's business transactions during last year, that will do."

"It shall be done, and to-night," said Paul.

"To-night!" said the priest to himself; "I thought that was his idea. So be it," he added, "What, are you going? Take some Cognac before you go."

"A hair of the dog that bit me?" said Chequerbent facetiously.

"No, Sir," said Heywood, "of no relation to that brown beast. This is a *liqueur* of a thousand. I am always here, mind, after ten at night."

"Some time after ten to-night expect me," said Paul, "and thanks for your hospitality."

"The vow of my order," said the priest, crossing his arms with mock gravity.

That day Mr. Chequerbent went to his business in a curious state of mind, and the peculiar locality of the office seemed to wear a new phase for him. He held a different relation with his principal to that which he had previously borne. Probably, although his intellect was none of the strongest, and although the loss of the faculty of reasoning accurately often accompanies the loss of the habit of self-control, he could not entirely close his eyes to the fact, that he had engaged to do a wrong thing—at all events, a thing that required a great deal of justification, and one which it would not do to describe baldly, and in the terms by which cold third parties would characterise it. Strictly speaking, he was going to avail himself of his situation, in order to place some of his employers' secrets in the possession of a stranger. So depicted, the act looked very much like a piece of rascality, and so, had our Paul's mind been in a healthy state, *he would have viewed it.* But he had always been very self-

indulgent, very reckless and shifty, and of late he had been soured by the inevitable consequences of his follies, and was disposed, instead of taking advantage of the lesson, to regard society as his enemy, and to look at its regulations with some contempt. Clearly the orthodox theory, which apprises us that all our misfortunes are for our good, had not yet been vindicated in Paul's case—he was decidedly the worse for what he had undergone.

As it happened, too, he was very late at the office on a day when Mr. Molesworth had wanted him. For a fortnight, they had never spoken, but this morning chance induced Molesworth to inquire four or five times for Mr. Chequerbent, and to be as often apprised that he had not yet arrived. When Paul did show himself, Mr. Molesworth's observations were not of a pleasing character, and his sarcastic recommendation to Paul to look out for some other vocation, for he would never be worth a farthing as a lawyer, did not tend to diminish Mr. Chequerbent's animosity against his employer.

"A dishonest old humbug," he observed, on departing. "He can say that to me now, having sacked my three hundred guineas premium. I suppose he would not return any of that, as compensation for not qualifying me for my profession. Eh? O! Of course. That did not occur to the ancient miscreant." And going to his desk, he recorded a vow of vengeance in his pocket-book, and felt calmer after that amiable entry.

The day went very slowly—dragging itself past rather than passing—but at length six o'clock arrived—and the various clerks departed, as did their employer. Paul had been considering different plans for effecting his object, and that upon which he had decided was to return late, under pretext of wanting some papers left in his desk, and so to make his way to the strong room in which Molesworth kept the box containing the book desired by Heywood. The offices of Messrs. Molesworth and Penkridge were in the rear of the house, which looked upon the street, and there was a side door, through which inferior clients, clerks, and others were admitted during the day. But, the more aristocratic employers of the firm were received by a porter at the door of the house itself. On the departure of the clerks the side door was barred and bolted, and the only access to the office was through the house. Paul's first idea was to

linger last, and then to achieve his purpose, but he was so much in the habit of anticipating the hour of leaving, and, like Charles Lamb, of atoning for coming late by going away early, that he feared to excite suspicion by departing from his practice. So he went away as usual, rather before than after the others. It was unlucky for him that he did so.

Paul got rid of the next three hours as best he might ; he went to dine, but had no appetite for dinner, and rather eschewed liquids, from a certain sense that he might require all his self-possession. And he was unable to fix his mind to a newspaper, and yet, by what he regarded as an absurd fatality, his eye incessantly lighted upon accounts of burglaries, and of terrible accidents happening to the unfortunate criminals, some falling off parapets, others being shot, and so forth. And though not superstitious, he could not help repeating to himself that perhaps these were warnings to him, and then he angrily discarded such ideas as unworthy of an enlightened man. And at last the time came at which he had determined to make his attempt.

He knew that there would be no one in the house, except the porter, and with this official he had always been on very excellent terms, cast-off clothes, cigars, and other small presents on the part of Paul, having established a good understanding between them. And he had planned that he would send out this man, whose name was Galton, to fetch him some spirits, an errand at which the porter was not entirely a novice, and during his absence, Paul would surmount the only real difficulty in his way, that of obtaining from Molesworth's room the key of the box. His entering that room might surprise Galton, or the latter might persist in attending him with a light, and so prevent his taking away the key ; but, that obtained, his proceedings in the distant office, beyond which was the strong-room, would be unobserved.

But as he was about to knock, the street door gave way before his hand. It had been left unclosed. Paul speculated for a minute as to whether this were by accident or design. If Galton had stolen out on some errand of his own, there was nobody in the place, and the opportunity was very favourable. He slipped quietly in, closed the door, and listened. There was *no sound* of any kind. A small lamp, which usually stood on

a bracket in the hall, had become extinguished, but Paul felt that it was in its place, and he lit it from a matchbox with which he had taken the precaution to provide himself. Then, taking the lamp, he made his way quietly to Mr. Molesworth's room. The door was closed, but this was usually the case, and the key, though seldom removed, was generally turned. Paul remembered this, applauded himself for recollecting it, and tried the key, but the door was unlocked. If Molesworth were there! But, looking through the key-hole, he saw that there was no light inside. He entered the room, and went at once to a glass-case, within which Molesworth was accustomed to place the bunch of keys that opened the boxes in the strong-room. There was no particular precaution used in regard to them, any clerk could have had them on asking for them, and giving a reason, but Molesworth liked to see them through the glass of his case. There they were. The door of the glass-case creaked, and Paul was enraged with it, and believed, like the schoolmen, in the inherent malignity of matter, but he captured the keys.

Then, turning to go, he looked round in the direction of Mr. Molesworth's usual seat. This was a comfortable high-backed arm-chair. It was drawn away from its place at the table, and in it sat, or rather reclined, a man.

Paul gave a great start, but neither dropped his lamp, nor uttered a cry. A singular presence of mind seemed to come to his aid, and he deliberately raised the light and inspected the stranger. He instantly made out, first, that the latter was a rough-looking fellow in a fustian jacket, and a red nightcap, and, secondly, that he was fast asleep.

"I have it," said Paul, "a housebreaker! What a scoundrel! he has let himself in, murdered Galton, and broken into Molesworth's wine closet. Having drunk himself stupid he has wandered here, and gone to sleep. My coming is most providential. I will make him safe."

And, forgetful for the moment of his own business there, he knelt down, and creeping close to the man, took out a large handkerchief, and secured the leg of the latter very tightly to that of the arm-chair. The man grunted a little, but did not awake. Paul then stole out, greatly elated at his stratagem, closed the door, and turned the key.

"Now," he said, "I will go and look for the body of the unhappy Galton."

But at that instant he recollected his own errand, and resolved to perform it. The service he was going to achieve rendered such a matter a mere trifle in his eyes, and he scarcely trod more lightly than usual as he hastened along the passages which led to the distant office.

The strong-room, which was simply a fire-proof chamber with an iron door, contained, in addition to more valuable documents, certain books of accounts, in daily use. These being wanted during the entire day, the clerk who first arrived in the morning usually took them out, and the key of the room was therefore merely concealed in a place where no one who had no business to know anything about it would think of looking for it. Paul, well acquainted with the place, went to it at once. The key was not there. The door of the strong-room was safely closed.

"That scoundrel has taken it," said Paul. "Perhaps he put Galton on the fire, and so compelled him to reveal the place where it was hidden." And, arming himself with a very heavy ruler, he went back, opened Molesworth's door quietly, and found his prisoner just as he had left him. And, truly enough, there lay the strong-room key on the table. Paul considered for a moment whether he ought not to demolish the miscreant at once, but he withheld his blow, from a mixture of feelings of which humanity may fairly be set down as the chief.

"He cannot escape," said Paul, "let us leave him to the hangman." And once more he hurried back to the office, and, setting down his lamp, applied the key to the centre of the door. Four large bolts were put in motion by the action, but they were well oiled, and slid back with little noise.

It was very little, but it was immediately followed by a hideous and menacing yell.

Paul turned very pale, and certain ghastly terrors came upon him. He could not exactly say that he believed in evil spirits, but very few men, I suppose, would care, when alone and at night, and about to commit an offence, to declare that such things did not exist; and whatever belief Paul may have had upon the subject suddenly and momentarily revived. But the

strange and terrible noise ceased ; and Paul, after an instant or two of hesitation, half persuaded himself that the whole affair had been an effort of the excited imagination.

He pulled open the iron door. Two flaming eyes, on a level with his own, met his gaze. The next moment he was dashed violently to the ground, and, though half stunned by the blow, he was conscious for a moment of intense pain. The fangs of the demon, or whatever it was, had fixed in his shoulder, and his arm was agonizingly lacerated. Hot breath was upon his face ; the eyes of fire were close upon his, and he fainted.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ANOTHER STEP FOR BERNARD CARLYON.



HE Minister, Selwyn, was at his desk of work, reading letters by the pound, and minuting upon each some three or four words, to be expanded into official replies by his subordinates. Each letter, at the startling rate at which practice and keenness enabled him to pluck out the heart of its mystery, occupied him on the average two minutes—allow another minute for consideration of the answer and for marking down the hieroglyphies as materials for it, and this railroad process gave but twenty letters to the hour. Yet people complain that epistles of eight sides of small writing, setting forth opinions upon matters of Government, and advice for the guidance of the Administration, receive curt replies, or mere acknowledgments from a Secretary of State.

Lord Rookbury demanded audience, and obtained it, for the virtuous Selwyn was always glad to receive his evil old friend and antagonist.

“Do you mean that you actually read that rubbish?” said the Earl, pointing with his ivory-headed cane at the heap of letters to Selwyn’s left.

“Some of it,” said the Minister, “but it will not prevent my listening to you.”

“I want you to leave off saving the country for a couple of hours, and take a drive with me, Selwyn. There now, don’t look as if you thought I was mad, and don’t tell me that you cannot be

spared, because I have seen all this sort of thing for years. I am not a deputation, you know, so you need not look awfully at me."

"No, but I expect three deputations in the course of the next hour."

"Let your clerks see them. You men make yourselves too common, granting audiences to any batch of nobodies who intrude their twaddle upon you for the sake of getting themselves noticed in the newspapers. I met a provincial Town Clerk in a railway the other day, and he told us all that he had been talking to you, and that he had induced you to give up the District Depopulation Bill. I informed him that I did not believe it, so he sulked and was silent, which made the rest of the journey more comfortable."

"I know the man. We had decided on giving up the bill a week before I ever heard of him, but he has a good deal of influence in his locality, and so—" said Selwyn, stopping, with a sort of deprecatory half smile.

"And so you let him think that his logic had converted you, eh, Frank? Dear me," said the Earl, "only to think that such wickedness should exist. But come out, will you? Can't you tell young Carlyon to send the proper paragraph? By the way, how does young Carlyon please you? Are you grateful for my recommendation?"

"He is a very good secretary," said Selwyn; "I was thinking of proposing something more permanent to him."

"What, give him up, if he suits you?" said Lord Rookbury.

"Well, in the first place, it is fair to a clever man to give him a lift—in the second, I think he can be made useful—in the third, he is your *protégé*—and in the fourth—no, I don't know that I have a fourth at present."

"Yes, you have," said the Earl, significantly.

"Then include the fourth," said Selwyn, with composure, "and tell me on all accounts why I should not do as I propose."

"In the fourth place," said Lord Rookbury, "Mr. Carlyon is a good deal at the Hotel Forester, Park Street. That's the way you treat the public, giving three weak reasons for your conduct, instead of one strong one, and that's why the intelligent public regards you as a red-taper. That woman will have you, Frank Selwyn—you had better strike while you can do it peacefully."

Let me convey your proposal to her, and you marry her when the House rises."

Selwyn looked defiant and rock-like, and not at all as a man who meant to let himself be married against his will; and then he went on with his letters.

"I like that Carlyon," said the Earl. "I sent him to you because I liked him; and I like him still. But I should not think of concealing anything from you, Frank, and I have discovered that this young gentleman's heart seems to be extraordinarily large. He first secures the affections of a sweet little girl in the country, one whom I quite loved as a daughter; and her he has thrown over for a Roman Catholic lady, with whom I believe he is seriously entangled—not so much so, however, as to prevent his forming a theatrical *liaison*, for you give him so little work to do that he has time to write plays. And fourthly, as you would say, there is a little matter in Mrs. Forester's keeping, of which, I dare say, he would be very sorry the Madonna should hear. Finally, I was yesterday apprised by a Catholic priest—such a clever fellow, Frank, I must make you know him—that Mr. Carlyon has other aspirations, in a quarter in which I have some interest."

"I cannot see," observed Selwyn, who saw that all this meant something more than had yet been said, "while my Secretary answers my letters punctually, and generally does his duty, that I have any right to inquire into his matrimonial views."

The Earl was growing wickedly irritable, but he had known Francis Selwyn for years, and was well aware that against that haughty and self-collected Evangelical the storm of his lordly wrath would have about as much influence as the dashing of a shower against the double windows of his apartment.

"Confound it," said the Earl, "when you get upon the high ropes, there is no talking to you. Will you listen to this? Do you know, that a very interesting event has recently taken place in my family?"

"I do not go to the theatres," said Selwyn, a little maliciously, "but somebody brought me a playbill, on which I read that an actress having been discovered——"

"Oh, hold your tongue," said the Earl, with an oath. "Wasn't it enough to drive one wild? However, I am going to punish the

scoundrel. But you say that you understood it. Why did not you write and congratulate me?"

"Because I supposed that I understood it," said Mr. Selwyn, gravely. "You know that I can look at such subjects in one way only, and that you will be annoyed if we continue the conversation."

"By George! I should like to know what you thought it meant, Master Frank," retorted the Earl. "Just as a matter of curiosity, now? For, to do you religious men justice, if one does allow you the slightest excuse for supposing anything improper, you do give your righteous imaginations the rein with a vengeance, and beat us all to nothing."

"I thought that I saw evidence that melancholy wickedness was in course of action," said Selwyn, gravely, "but I did not desire to follow out its details in thought, nor do I now desire to discuss them. You are a highly intellectual man, Rookbury, and you know all that there is to say on such affairs."

"I will say that you seldom talk cant to me, Frank, and you will admit that, in return, I seldom vex your soul with observations that you do not like to hear. But I must tell you that, on the present occasion, you have made a marvellous mistake. You read in that cursed playbill that a young lady was to leave the stage, and that I—"

"I believe," said Selwyn, with displeasure at the subject being pursued, "that it is not the first time that a miserable young woman has left her miserable profession at your suggestion. A time may probably come when you will think of these things with less levity. Meantime, let us avoid the discussion."

"As I supposed," cried the Earl, triumphantly, and applauding with his cane. "Bravo, Clapham! Bravo, Exeter Hall! Trust you for putting the very worst possible interpretation upon everything. This time, however, my dear Selwyn, you are quite wrong. I do not mean to say that I am quite free from blame in the affair, seeing that I neglected the young lady in question for many years during which I ought to have watched over her. But I have at last come forth as a father should do, and claimed my child. No, you need not look so doubtfully, or take up Debrett in that manner—you will not find her name mentioned there."

"Nor her mother's, I imagine," said Selwyn.

"Possibly not," said Lord Rookbury, gravely. "I was abroad when we were married, and the editor's circular requesting the latest corrections did not reach me."

"We need not play with the poor girl's misfortune," said the Minister, evidently regarding this last speech as a mystification.

"Thank you," said Lord Rookbury, "but bad as I may be, I cannot see that it is exactly a misfortune for a young lady to be called my daughter. In a word, Selwyn, this girl, of whom you have heard, is my child, in lawful wedlock, and though, for reasons which I will explain to you, I desire to postpone my public recognition of her at present, her *avenir* will be a very happy one."

"In some way," said the Minister, "you were going to connect her name with that of my Secretary. I do not desire to inquire into any family arrangements, but what are you leading up to?"

"To what I started with. I want you to delay giving Carlyon his place."

"Are you going to marry the young lady to Bernard Carlyon?" asked Selwyn, quickly.

"No, no," said the Earl, thrown off his guard for a moment by the statesman's sudden question. If he had seen its intent, he would assuredly have lied.

"In that case," said Selwyn, "I could easily have understood that you might desire to make your own provision for him, or to test his disinterestedness, or fifty things. But if the young people are nothing to one another, I do not see how her position affects his."

"You will have chapter and verse for everything, Selwyn. Did I not tell you that a Catholic priest gave me some information yesterday, which concerned a person in whom I am interested."

"I do not believe, as a rule, everything Roman Catholic priests say," said Selwyn, (with Protestant emphasis on the localizing word), "nor, I imagine, do you. But you insist on being mysterious, and yet you ask me to do what I feel would be unjust. Do you mean that the giving young Carlyon this berth will embolden him to make advances towards Miss—Miss—"

"Towards Lady Anna Rookton," said the Earl, angrily. "After what I have said, you can have no doubt as to her name. And you have rightly guessed the reason why I wish Mr. Carlyon retained for the present in his situation of Secretary."


He lied this time, that good-for-nothing old Earl, for he knew that had he given the real reason Selwyn would have cut the interview very short. But he felt that he had failed in obtaining his object, and was not at all surprised to hear Selwyn say,

"Upon my word, Rookbury, I do not think that is reason enough for doing Carlyon an injustice. Let him offer for your daughter, if he likes. You can refuse him, you know; though, upon my word, I do not know that I should. I shall give him his place, I think."

And the first deputation was announced, and Lord Rookbury departed in a great rage.

CHAPTER XL

LEE WAY.

HE Minister was as good as his word, and Bernard Carlyon had the satisfaction of apprising Lilian, about a week after the conversation between Selwyn and the Earl, that he had received a permanent appointment, which was already valuable, and which would, in due official course, be exchanged for something better. He had also the internal comfort of reflecting that he owed this entirely to his own exertions in the trial-sphere into which he had been introduced by Lord Rookbury; for Selwyn, in the upright discharge of his duty, deemed it right to apprise Carlyon, that his former patron had conceived a dislike to him, and that his advancement was by no means to be an additional item in his debt of gratitude to the Earl.

Selwyn, who regarded Carlyon with considerable interest, did not hesitate to add a few words, rather of hint than of remonstrance, and based upon the story which the Earl had compiled, touching Bernard's susceptibility to feminine attraction. The Minister did not give much credence to the tale, as presented to

him, being well aware of his noble friend's talent for defamation, but on the supposition that where there was so much smoke of scandal there might be some fire of fact, he, good-naturedly, counselled Bernard to increase his chance of winning one of the prizes of life by concentrating his attentions. He refused to say more, but parted very kindly with Carlyon, and adding a hope that though their connection ended, their acquaintanceship might not do so ; and Carlyon, on his side, expressed a regret, which was sincere, at resigning the employment which had brought him into constant and confidential intercourse with the high-minded and intellectual statesman.

Despite what Selywn had told him, Bernard determined to call upon the Earl, and make formal acknowledgment that his promotion had grown out of the introduction originally given him by Lord Rookbury. The Earl received him with much cordiality, having, in the interim between that time and his talk with Selwyn, got over, not only the rage in which we left him, but, at least, a dozen succeeding bursts of wrath, and having also arrived at the conclusion, that as his evangelical friend would infallibly do what he had promised, there was no use in contesting the matter further. So his Lordship assured Carlyon that he had never entertained any doubt of his rising as soon as his talents should become appreciated, and that he, the Earl, had therefore abstained from urging upon the Minister to attend to Bernard's interests, feeling that it would be more gratifying to the latter to know that he was the architect of his own fortunes. In fact, therefore, the Earl said, Bernard really owed him no thanks for his advancement, a statement to which the newly-appointed Secretary to the Salvages and Contingencies Office gave ready credence.

Lord Rookbury then began, *more suo*, to discuss the doings of the Wilmslows, and others with whom they were both acquainted. Bernard had for some time heard nothing of the Aspen Court family, and he was interested in hearing how the curious *ménage* which he had helped to arrange was proceeding. Lord Rookbury was as frank as usual when speaking of other people's affairs. Mr. Wilmslow was, he said, as great a block-head as ever, but his vices were taking a more sullen and selfish character—he drank hard, and squandered away a good deal of money at billiards and other amusements.

"But where does he get the money, and where does he find the players?" asked Carlyon, remembering that Molesworth was not likely to supply the former very liberally, and that Aspen Court was at a most inconvenient distance from the nearest provincial town where anything like Henry Wilmslow's set could be found.

"Well, I have been fool enough to lend him a good deal of money," said the Earl, "and he has bought a horse, and rides off to Bristol and other places, and relieves his amiable family of his society until he gets cleaned out."

"I hope he duly appreciates your singular kindness," said Carlyon, who was hardly entitled to put, point blank, the question, why Lord Rookbury threw away his coin so absurdly. Of course, however, the Earl knew what he meant, and told him so.

"Suppose," said Lord Rookbury, "that I do it to annoy Mrs. Wilmslow, who hates me. Or suppose that I am a better Christian than that, and try to render good for evil, by alluring Henry Wilmslow to leave his wife and children to their own quiet avocations, instead of worrying them with his vile ill-temper and viler good temper. Or suppose that he has assured his life in my favour, and I want him to break his neck that I may get my money."

"The last supposition is not impossible," said Bernard, not over-pleased with the Earl's tone of banter, and desirous to throw in a shot in return.

"No," said Lord Rookbury; "but it is not the right one after all. You know that I did myself the honour of proposing to Miss Wilmslow."

"Your Lordship intimated, one evening, that you had done so."

"Safe man. But your own special confidante, Mrs. Wilmslow, told you so herself, and mightily deplored that such a wicked person as I am should have taken such a liberty."

"You were pleased to follow it up by a greater one, my Lord," said Bernard, "which cost me some hard riding."

"Surely you do not grudge the trouble which made you such a hero in the eyes of the Aspen Court ladies. That galloping up and delivering them from the rabble they consider the most magnificent feat ever heard of. I think little Amy has made a

ballad, in which you are compared to St. George overthrowing the dragon, the balance of glory being rather in your favour. Why don't you ask after the family? or do you hear so regularly that you have no need of any information?"

"I have heard nothing from Aspen Court for a long time," said Bernard.

"Theseus has abandoned the Ariadnes of Aspen, eh?" returned Lord Rookbury. "Still you will be glad to know that, despite your desertion, two of the three young ladies are as well, and look as well as ever. But as for the third"—and the Earl spoke more gravely.

"Kate?" said Carlyon, involuntarily.

"Kate is the second," said Lord Rookbury, composedly. "You know best why you should instinctively suppose that Kate had suffered."

Carlyon did know best, but he did not know what to say, and the Earl did not help him. After a pause, Bernard said,

"I hope nothing is seriously the matter with poor little Amy."

"I fear," said Lord Rookbury, "that the poor child is not long for this world."

"What! Amy," exclaimed Bernard, much shocked. "That sunshiny little face!" He stopped to hear more.

"A cloud has come over that sunshine," said the Earl, in a tone of real feeling, "and I doubt whether a darker shadow be not approaching faster than is believed at Aspen Court. I have seen some sad business in my time, Carlyon," he continued, "and there is not much that I need a physician should tell me. But a physician will have to tell a cruel story to poor dear Mrs. Wilmslow before long."

"It will kill *her*," said Carlyon, in a low voice. "She is the best mother in the world, and is devoted to all the girls, but little Amy she idolises."

"And I will tell you why," said Lord Rookbury, once more speaking in the calm voice of one who analyses a subject, but without sympathy. "That child was born just as the dream that Henry Wilmslow was anything but a selfish profligate came to an end. Amy is the link between her mother's happiness and her desolation. That link is about to be broken, but Mrs. Wilmslow has too strong a sense of duty to let her heart break with the sorrow."

Carlyon listened with much surprise, as Lord Rookbury uttered these sentences. Bernard had never heard him give so much proof that he could appreciate a woman's nature or her goodness. That evil old man, who had walked in his reckless way over the world's best gardens, he had, then, sometimes owned the beauty of the flowers he had snatched and cast away. More often, perhaps, than the younger man imagined.

"I believe that you are right," said Carlyon, who had always done justice to the noble nature of Jane Wilmslow. "I believe that you are right," he repeated. "She will live for her other children."

"It is, as you will have supposed, consumption," said the Earl. "But it is most probable that she would have strengthened, and have mastered the disease, but for a fatal shock which you will well remember, and which, prostrating her, left her helpless too long to give hope that she could again resist the old enemy."

"The fright—the skeleton—the day she first entered Aspen Court," said Carlyon, the scene recurring to him with painful distinctness.

"Ay, the freak of that mad clergyman has struck down Amy Wilmslow," said the Earl. "I believe," he added savagely, "that one has the consolation of knowing that no curse one could devise comes up to what he suffers already, or it would be a sin to speak of him without an execration."

"He is irresponsible," said Carlyon, with a pitying recollection of Eustace Trevelyan, and it may be, softened by another recollection—that he had met him in the society of Lilian.

"Nobody is irresponsible, Sir," said the Earl, relapsing into one of his wayward fits. "Amy will die, and that man will have killed her, and I wish it were left to me to settle whether his starting and whimpering should save his neck from the gallows."

Carlyon did not deem this outbreak worth a reply, and Lord Rookbury, incensed, mended matters with another.

"Or, if he is irresponsible," said the Earl, "his responsibility must be transferred to somebody else. There are a priest and a niece, I understand, who have charge of him. Where were they, when he was devising that infamous jest? The death of poor Amy is chargeable upon the heads of that priest and of the *girl*."

"You talk atrocious folly, and you know it, Lord Rookbury," said Carlyon, with his face in a flame at this reference to Lilian. "It would be even more reasonable to lay the poor child's fate to your conduct in detaining her and her sisters at Rookton, and exposing them to the ruffianism you have spoken of."

It was, we know, one of this strange old man's characteristics, that in the midst of one of his vilest tempers he could be suddenly brought to his senses, if the individual whom he assailed confronted him with an audacity like his own. It was not that he was in the slightest degree cowed, but he liked to see self-assertion. His tone immediately altered.

"I should be very, very sorry to think so, Bernard. The detaining them at my house was a whim, but it did no more than a rainy evening would have done, and on the whole, I believe they were more amused than annoyed."

"Their mother regarded the affair differently," said Bernard, indignantly.

"And under what impression she did so, you know best," retorted Lord Rookbury. "I am indebted to you for having led Mrs. Wilmslow to believe that I had invited her daughter to a house where somebody's presence implied contamination, you being well aware, not only that I am incapable of such an outrage upon ordinary decency—(I don't speak of morals, I have no morals, and never pretended to any)—but you, I say, knowing perfectly well that the only person, not a menial, living at Rookton Woods, was little Lurline, whom, moreover, I took especial care that they should not see."

"Your Lordship utterly mistakes and misstates the case," said Bernard. "I never exchanged a word with Mrs. Wilmslow on such a subject as your domestic arrangements, until the day when I learned that the young ladies were at Rookton, and then it was only to allay her feelings by the positive assurance, that I believed the little girl you speak of to be the only lady in the place."

"By Jove, I believed it was you who had told her of all sorts of horrors," said the Earl, dropping into a familiar conversational tone. "To be sure, I ought to have thought better of you, and a great deal worse of somebody else. Of course it was that vulgar hound Wilmslow, who must have filled his wife's head with such trash."

"I never supposed Mr. Wilmslow capable of much invention," said Bernard, coldly.

"Nor I," said the Earl, laughing. "Of course, I may have amused myself by telling him any rubbish that came into my head, but it was foolish in him to believe it, and ungentleman-like to repeat it. Half the charm of social life would be destroyed if a fellow were to be so ungrateful as to retail against you the fictions you composed for his entertainment."

"We were speaking of a graver matter," said Carlyon. "Setting aside whatever has interrupted us, may I ask your Lordship whether a medical man is in attendance at Aspen Court?"

"No," said Lord Rookbury, "for Mrs. Wilmslow does not see the danger—or else will not bring herself to believe that she sees it. Of course, a stranger could hardly advise it. Indeed, hardened as I am to most other people's troubles, I would sooner suffer some personal hurt than undergo the task of breaking the matter to Amy's mother."

"Yet it ought to be done," said Bernard, musingly. "And then, if there should be a chance of saving her, and we throw that chance away—"

"I have thought of that," said the Earl. "But I tell you frankly, Bernard, that I cannot and will not face that woman, who has been treated almost as badly in this world as ever created woman was, and tell her that another blow is to descend upon her. I don't mind a woman's crying, and clinging to one, and vowing that one's cruelty will kill her, and all that—I have seen too much of it—how easily it is got up, and how little it has to do with anything but her selfishness; but I will not, at my time of life, willingly undergo the actual suffering of looking at the quietly borne agony, which I foresee will soon be read in Mrs. Wilmslow's face. D—n *me* if I can, or if I *will*, then," said Lord Rookbury, with unusual emphasis.

Bernard, we have seen, had little regard for his noble friend, and small belief in his sincerity; but the tone and manner of Lord Rookbury made it impossible to doubt that for once he was in earnest.

"A friend of such a woman ought to make any sacrifice of *his own* comfort for her sake," said Bernard. "After what your Lordship has said, I have made up my mind."

"You propose to go to Aspen Court, and inform Mrs. Wilmslow of her child's danger. It would, no doubt, be doing, I will not say a kindness, but something higher. I say, unaffectedly, Bernard, that I honour you for undertaking this work. Will you take a suggestion from me?"

"Assuredly," said Carlyon.

"Let the visit answer two purposes. Take down with you a first-rate physician, but do not let him make his errand known until he has, unobserved, examined the poor child, and until you have prepared Mrs. Wilmslow. You are not in the highest favour with Wilmslow himself."

"I am happy to say I am not," said Bernard.

"Exactly. But it is as well to avoid unpleasantness. Wilmslow will obey any directions from me as implicitly as the block-head's nature will allow. I will desire him to be especially civil to you, and to your companion, who has come, by my desire, to look at Aspen Court, for reasons which Wilmslow will understand, or think he does. That will secure him perfect freedom of action, and you can manage the rest. Does any particular name occur to you as that of the man you would take down?"

"I am rather intimate with Rockbrook," said Carlyon. "If he would go, he is the man."

"Pooh—we'll make his refusal impossible," said the Earl, opening a cabinet, and taking out a cheque-book. "He is a first-rate fellow, and will do what any second-rate fellow would be afraid to do, namely, lend himself to the little deception without fear of compromising his dignity."

The Earl wrote two cheques, one for a magnificent fee, and the other for a smaller amount.

"That for Rockbrook," he said, showing the sum to Carlyon, "and this please to use for expenses. Nay," he said earnestly, "you will confer a very great obligation upon me by letting me feel that, though too great a coward to do this myself, I have, in some degree, assisted you in doing it. Put it up, it is not worth a second word. I suppose that you can leave town to-morrow. Not before, because I think my letter to Wilmslow should precede you—it will prevent his wife's being taken by surprise at your arrival. You hesitate as to that? Pray be frank, I fear that you have some good reason."

"It just seems to me possible that Mr. Wilmslow, regarding

the proposed visit as one of business, might not keep the young ladies at home. I don't know whether they have made any acquaintance in the immediate neighbourhood, but—"

"You are a very clever man, Bernard," said the Earl, "and I see what you mean, but will not say. The second Miss Wilmslow's pride has been roused by finding that, though she cares very much for you, your affections are placed elsewhere, and you think that delicacy will scare her away when she hears that you are coming, and that she will take a sister with her. Now, my word for it, she will remain and confront you."

"At all events," said Bernard, who was indisposed to prolong the discussion, "I am glad that your Lordship has clearer views on a certain point than you had when I first visited Rookton Woods."

"Not a bit clearer," said the Earl. "I told you then that the young lady's heart was yours—those were my words. I see no reason for retracting them. You may marry her now, if you like. It would please her mother—it would certainly please herself; and as for that blatant ass, who would be your esteemed father-in-law, he must do as I please. Only, if you do make the marriage, you must keep your wife out of the Forester set."

"I admire the ease with which your Lordship turns from a grave subject to a light one," said Carlyon, "but I cannot just now imitate it, for I am sincerely grieved at what I have heard to-day. I will see Rockbrook at once. I think I shall just be in time to catch him at St. Vitus's Hospital, where he visits."

"I talk as others think," said the Earl. "My dear young friend, we should all go mad in one day if we gave anything the continuous attention which it is deemed decorous to affect in speech. You might as well try to keep the eye fixed for half an hour, as the brain, and lucky for us that it is so. Broach that theory to the students at St. Vitus's, and good-bye."

CHAPTER XLI.

OLD FRIENDS AGAIN.



OST of the misfortunes of our lives are of our own making ; an old truth, illustrated in the position in which we left Mr. Paul Chequerbent at the close of the last chapter of his history.

He had closed the street-door of the house, and had thereby excluded the porter Galton. And he had tied by the leg, to an armchair, the only other person in the place, except himself. His own precautions, therefore, increased the chances against him, and when the creature that had occupied the strong-room dashed forth upon him, and brought him to the ground, his situation became perilous in the extreme, and the recollection that he was beyond all aid, came upon him so powerfully as, in combination with the fright, to deprive him of consciousness.

There were doubtless many very bad things in that lawyer's strong-room, but there was nothing quite so evil as Paul, in the few moments between his opening the door and being thus prostrated, had, perhaps, believed. Those who have read this narrative from the commencement, will remember our mentioning that Mr. Molesworth had a partner named Penkridge, who resided at Norwood, and there kept a menagerie, wherewith he frightened himself and his neighbours. Mr. Penkridge used to haunt the docks and other quarters where he was likely to pick up additions to his collection, and used, of course, to be fearfully cheated by guileless sailors who had brought over the animals as pets, sailors who never made a voyage in their lives, and who bought for trifling prices, of country showmen, creatures for which the confiding Penkridge was happy to pay formidable sums. It was an edifying sight to see the mild, neat Mr. Penkridge seated upon one of the narrow hard boards which serve for seats in the hotels of Ratcliffe Highway, and surrounded by four or five dirty, crafty, crimp-like fellows, the party listening—Penkridge all faith, the confederates with approval—to a clumsy yarn touching the capture of the animal which the attorney was just then buying. Few of Mr. Penkridge's quadrupeds had,

according to the sellers, killed less than six or seven men ; and the aggregate slaughter which the united menagerie must have committed among helpless natives and gallant officers in the Queen's and Company's service was frightful. His last purchase, however—that of a striped hyæna—bade fair, as we have seen, to deserve a ferocious reputation ; though, as it happened, this had been bought on the strength of its gentleness to its owner, the gentleman whom Paul had tied by the leg. Mr. Penkridge had purchased it too late in the day to receive it at Norwood, and a happy idea had suggested itself for its lodgment in the meantime. The keeper, under whose eye and short iron stick it was really docile, had been brought to the office, to be received for the night, and despatched with his interesting charge to Norwood in the morning, and the porter conceived the notion that the strong-room would be a capital place of security for the beast. Galton had shown much attention to the plebeian Van Amburgh, and had gone forth on hospitable thoughts intent, when Mr. Chequerbent's ill-fortune led him to the door of the mansion. It is sad to think, too, that Mr. Galton's kindness was not well rewarded ; for, on that person's returning with the materials for supper, and finding the door, which he had left ajar, closed against him, he had no resource but knocking. In this he had to persevere for a long time in vain ; but at last the noise aroused the wild-beast man, who, starting up, was brought to the ground, chair and all, by Paul's device. As soon as he could extricate himself, which process he assisted by a series of choice comminations, he blundered to the door, and opening it, he admitted the person whom he supposed to have played a practical joke upon him, and with one well-delivered blow floored his astonished host. The two men wrangled and quarrelled for some time ; but at length the truth dawned upon them that a third party must have mingled in the business ; and search being made, Paul was found, to their great consternation, lying senseless, in the distant office, the hyæna, which had abandoned him after the first bite, crouching on a shelf, amid old declarations and pleas, and other fangs of its relatives, "the furred law cats" of Rabelais. Paul was removed to the porter's bed ; and as soon as the others had arranged the falsehood by which the porter's abandonment of his post was to be screened, a surgeon was fetched. Mr. Chequerbent was soon restored to

consciousness ; but the wounds he had received were serious, and would probably, the doctor thought, be attended by violent inflammation. Quiet and constant care were pronounced absolutely necessary ; and, after some deliberation, the aristocratic Paul Chequerbent, whose own bewilderment left him small voice in the debate, was actually removed to St. Vitus's Hospital.

His reception at that establishment was somewhat more agreeable than he had expected ; for he had some uneasy misgivings lest the whole forces of the hospital, including three or four doctors of great West End repute, would be turned out to welcome him, and that his misfortunes, as retailed by the latter, would furnish a theme for the conversation of the metropolis. But St. Vitus's did not appear to share in Mr. Chequerbent's estimate of his own importance ; and after a brief examination by the house-surgeon, who confirmed the view of the medical man first called in, Paul was assisted to the "Galen Ward," and deposited in one of sixteen small, curtainless, cleanly-looking beds which stood in two rows in the formal, yellow-walled chamber ; the whole proceeding taking place in the most quiet manner, and the officials acting as composedly as if they were in the habit of seeing aristocrats eaten by hyænas. The hard-faced nurse gave Paul rather a keen glance, which was probably satisfactory, for she proceeded to pay him, not only the ordinary attentions she owed to a patient, but others by no means of routine, and which credible witnesses assure us the hospital nurse reserves for those who have the power and the will to be grateful. Mr. Chequerbent, indeed, aware of this peculiarity, took an opportunity of apprising her that he was a gentleman ; and was somewhat comforted in his affliction by her assuring him, with a smile, that there was no need to tell her that. Moreover, the Galen Ward happened at that time to be about half empty.

It was one or two days after this that Carlyon, leaving Lord Rookbury hastened to St. Vitus's Hospital to secure the services of Mr. Rockbrook. As he waited in the hall, the priest Heywood, came down, passed him with a slight bow, and went out.

"Has he been confessing some Catholic patient ?" said Carlyon to Mr. Rockbrook, who followed Heywood.

"No," said Rockbrook, "he came to see a young fellow with an odd name, who met with an odd accident. Exchequerby—no—but it is something about the exchequer, too. What's that name in the Galen Ward, the hyæna bite, Warren?"

"Chequerbent," said the dresser, who was in attendance on his chief.

"I never heard of more than one person of that name," said Carlyon, "but it can hardly be he. Can I see him, when you and I have spoken?"

The visit to Aspen Court was speedily arranged, Mr. Rockbrook, a man of decision as well as of skill, taking just three minutes to consider whether he could be spared from town, and announcing the result, by desiring Carlyon to meet him at the mail train next evening. As he took the cheque, he said,—

"This would be too much by half, but your friend, the Earl, cheated me out of about the balance ten years ago, when I had attended a lady specially recommended to me by him. I suppose this is conscience money, and he is pleased that he has had the interest in the meantime."

"Much his way," said Bernard. "But don't let me detain you. I should like to see the patient, however, because if he is *my* Chequerbent, he will be glad to see me."

But Bernard mistook, for Paul was not at all glad to see him, and looked so sulky—he fancied that he was being dignified and reserved—that Carlyon could not understand the case. Paul would give no account of the accident, would accept no service, and begged that Mr. Carlyon would not consume his valuable time in visiting an hospital.

"This is all nonsense," said Bernard, as soon as he had made out that Paul was really offended with him. "Somebody has been setting you against me. That wont do. I appeal, point blank, to your own gentlemanly nature, and ask you whether the terms on which we have lived justify you in quarrelling with me without telling me why. Come, Paul, treat me fairly, and then be as haughty as you please."

The word was well chosen. Paul had wished to appear haughty, and as his haughtiness was acknowledged, down he came from his pedestal.

"I don't deny it, Carlyon," he said, "that you have often acted a *friendly* part by me. But if you cannot see that your present

conduct has cancelled for ever all kindly memories, I despair of convincing you."

"My dear fellow," said Bernard, "never use portentous words until you are quite sure they are wanted. And first tell me what you mean by my present conduct."

"You cannot doubt my meaning, Carlyon. I wish to abstain from introducing the name of a lady into our quarrel."

"We have no quarrel yet, I tell you," said Bernard. "But as my conscience entirely acquits me of ever doing or saying anything with reference to any lady which could give you uneasiness, I am afraid I must ask you for her name."

"Do you mean to deny," said Paul, "that you have certain matrimonial projects?"

"On the contrary," said Carlyon, "I mean to affirm the fact most strenuously. What is your reason for desiring that I should continue a bachelor? Have you discovered that I am your elder brother, or anything of that kind? You shall be none the worse by my marriage."

"Don't make a joke of it, Carlyon," said Paul. "I shall be a great deal the worse by your marriage."

"I wonder why," said Bernard, slowly, and in an amused tone. "You cannot well be the lady's unjust guardian, whom I am to call to account—I don't know, though—perhaps you may be. You never saw her—possibly that is another proof of your neglect—yes—"

"What do you say?" cried Paul, sitting up in bed, and opening great eyes. "I never saw her? Are you mad?"

"Do me a favour, Paul," said the other. "Just look straight in my face, and pronounce to me the name of the person you suppose I want to marry; because I see, very clearly, where you are."

Paul was brightening up enormously, but providentially he remembered his dignity, and restrained himself.

"I had reason to believe," he said, in a voice in which delight would make itself heard, despite his endeavours, "that the nobleman who has done you so many favours was going to do you another, and confer upon you the hand of his newly found daughter."

"What!" said Bernard, laughing, "your friend, the pretty actress! That was your notion. Make yourself easy. To say

nothing of the presumption of thinking to win against you, because in truth the thought never entered my head, you might have given me credit for some regard for your feelings. I do not think I ever showed myself very unmindful of them."

"You have not, you have not," said poor Paul, who was ready to cry. "But you have taken such a load off my heart."

"You were no wiser than you ought to have been, when you let anybody lay it on, Master Paul. Who was it? That Jesuit whom I met downstairs?"

"Never mind who," said Paul. "It's all over. I am very much obliged to you for coming to see me."

"Thank your friend, the priest," said Bernard. "You ought to have sent for me. But for the merest accident I should never have known that you were here. However, you are in first-rate hands; I will specially commend you to Rockbrook, though that is not necessary. And now tell me how you came to get bitten by the wild beast."

"It is very simple," said Paul, colouring. "I opened the strong-room at the office, and the beast inside flew at me."

"Why, what were the other fellows about, not to tell you that the creature was there."

"They were all gone," said Paul. "The hyæna," he added, as if desirous to get away from the other part of the story, "was a new pet of Penkridge's. So Galton told me after the accident."

"Did you know the beast was there, then?"

"Of course not. Do you think I should have been such an idiot?" He stopped, for it suddenly occurred to him that Carlyon had suggested a most capital account of the affair, and one too good to be destroyed. "Of course, I mean," he added, "I did not know it was a hyæna, or I should not have opened the door. I thought, from its voice, that it was a dog of some kind, and any dog I can easily quiet."

Carlyon had no clue to the real story, but something in Paul's manner convinced him that Mr. Chequerbent was not speaking the exact truth.

"Well," he said, "it is lucky that things are not worse. By the way, I did not know that you were acquainted with Mr. Heywood. If you had gone to Aspen Court with me you would

have met him, but you preferred to go to a ball, and be locked up. How did you make his acquaintance?"

"He introduced himself to me at the Fortress, as a friend of yours, and showed me a good deal of attention," said Paul. "I breakfasted with him at his rooms."

"When?"

"The morning before the hyæna affair."

"It was then that he put into your head the notion about me and Miss Livingstone?" said Bernard.

"No, indeed it was not," said Paul. Which was true, for this had been done on the night before.

"Paul," said Carlyon, "one word, and you will pardon it, because I have, as you will admit, earned the right to-day to sin against you once and be forgiven. I do not ask any questions, but Heywood would not have invited you to breakfast if he had not intended to use you as a tool. Beware of him. If I made a guess at certain matters I should pain you needlessly, but all I say is—beware of that priest. And now—by Jove, here is a handsome woman—and coming to see you—and a young lady too."

Never was a disagreeable conversation so agreeably broken off, for here entered our splendid friend, the Junonian Mrs. Sellinger, with her full figure and bright dark eyes. But what of her, when another figure escapes from her protecting hand, and runs, half crying, up to Paul, and calls him a wicked old thing for not sending for her? Oh, my Lady Anna, are these your Rookton manners?

CHAPTER XLII.

THE PRIEST AND THE PEER.



HEYWOOD satisfied himself in the course of a quarter of an hour which he spent by the bedside of Paul Chequerbent, that the latter was effectually disqualified from rendering him service or co-operation for some time to come—much longer than the priest deemed it desirable to wait. Consoling Paul, therefore, with some wholesome assurances that he would soon be convalescent, and that in the meantime his interests with Lord

Rookbury's daughter should not suffer, Heywood departed, little imagining that in less than an hour from his leaving St. Vitus's Hospital, the Lady Anna would present herself in person to confirm Paul's hopes.

The channel through which her Ladyship—we like to see our little girl in possession of all her honours—had heard of her lover's misfortune had been a homely one. In the early part of this history we had occasion to describe the residence of Mrs. Sellinger, the handsome and Juno-like dancing mistress in Spelton Street, Clerkenwell. On one of the landings of that miscellaneous colony dwelt a Mr. Glink, who, under the pretence of fancying birds, stole dogs. Some birds, however, which he did fancy, were of a feather kindred to his own, and among them happened to be the biped who had sold the hyæna to Mr. Penkridge, and whom Paul had tied by the leg in the manner already set forth. Mr. Chequerbent's fight on the ball night had interested Mr. Glink's sympathies in his favour, and, indeed, that gentleman stated confidently to Mrs. Sellinger (who occasionally permitted him the honour of a word or two on the staircase) that had she given him a hint of her wishes, on that eventful night, he would have effected such a diversion in Paul's favour as would have ensured his escape from the police, a manœuvre which he had conceived might have been adroitly effected by turning about a dozen bull-terriers loose into the ball-room, with special reference to the calves of the male guests. On hearing from his friend, the hyæna-man, a somewhat distorted narrative of the accident to Paul, Mr. Glink hastened to Mrs. Sellinger with the news of her friend's ill-fortune, and the warm-hearted Mary Sellinger, in her turn, hurried off to Angela's lodgings, and imparted the unwelcome tidings. The little actress, who, as she believed, had delivered Paul from the vengeance of the magistrate, and who had exerted herself so vigorously to extricate him from the sponging-house, was not likely to abandon him in his greater sorrow. Under ordinary circumstances she would have proceeded to the hospital alone, without the slightest hesitation; but the recollection of her illustrious father just impressing, but not daunting her, she demanded the escort of the matron—and obtained it.

The interview between Paul and Carlyon had so greatly reassured Mr. Chequerbent's mind, that Angela's visit, which,

an hour earlier, would have much discomposed him, rendered him more happy than he had been since his various discouragements set in. Her manner was as frank and as arch as ever, and after her first earnest inquiries, the actress's habitual liveliness expended itself in a set of odd criticisms on the novel scene around her; they were, perhaps, not very new, or very clever, but the tone took Paul back to pleasant days—long country lounges in sunshiny weather, followed by a cheerful *lôte-à-lôte* dinners, at which Angela and he had seemed to have one mission—that of enjoying themselves—and had faithfully fulfilled it. And he reproached himself with not having sufficiently appreciated those holidays as they passed; for he had not then quite reached the time when troublous lessons teach us to look on one quiet day, without a thought for the immediate morrow, as “a thing to thank Heaven on.” He was, however, in train for the teaching.

Poor Paul's heart grew very full, every now and then, and he felt marvellously inclined to say a good deal more—in a few words—to Angela than he had ever said before. But if a man has any gentlemanly instincts, and our Paul, foolish as he often was, had several, they will be called out in the presence of a good, frank, affectionate woman; and Paul, though he looked rather helplessly into Angela's bright eyes, and felt that his own were disposed to swim, managed to hold his tongue upon the subject nearest his heart. For he could not disguise from himself that there he lay, very poor, disabled, perhaps disgraced, but at all events in a bad position, between poverty and idleness, to the eye of his friends, and he saw no future to console him. On the other hand, there stood Angela, looking fresher and prettier than ever, recognised by a wealthy and titled father, and about to be introduced to the very society for which Paul had always languished, but to which even in his good days he could not attain. It is something to the poor fellow's credit that the contrast of situations did not turn his spirit to a mood of bitterness, and that, while feeling that he should be doing Angela an injustice did he seek, under the circumstances, to engage or fetter her, he contrived to talk cheerfully and thankfully. For, beloved brethren, it is easy enough for you, hypocrites as you are, to lounge against the mantel-piece, you being in your elegant attire, and with gold in your *porte-monnaie*, and your bow

and smile ready, and thus, at advantage, to address Miss Amaranth, there, in that *chaise longue*, and to say to her those things which you do not feel, and to leave unsaid those things which you do feel, and then to go away like gentlemen and men of the world. But throw one of you down on a poor hospital bed, and let there be two half-crowns and fourpence in his purse, and let him have in his shoulder a wound which he is ashamed to say how he received, and while he is in that state of wretchedness, and poverty, and discouragement, let Miss Amaranth come in her best toilette and look at him, and if he behaves as well as Paul Chequerbent, why then, beloved brethren, I shall be very glad to think that good behaviour is not so uncommon as people tell us is the case.

Meatime the Reverend Cyprian Heywood had decided upon his course, and was making for Acheron Square. He had resolved upon a coalition.

Lord Rookbury was, of course, an excellent Protestant, and too firm in his own theological convictions to be afraid lest the accomplished Jesuit should succeed in converting him to the old faith. He had not slain the lion to be devoured by the wolf. He had not resisted all Mr. Selwyn's efforts to make him comprehend that morality was a duty, to be shaken from the religion of his fathers by a Catholic polemic. At least we will hope that such were his thoughts when, on receiving Heywood's card, he instantly accorded audience to that dangerous person.

They had met in society two or three times since our story commenced, and Lord Rookbury's general history was very well known to the priest. Of Heywood, the Earl knew little, but to look at the Jesuit was to receive a favourable impression of him, and Lord Rookbury had a conviction that he could read a man at a glance. To do him justice, he was more frequently right than most men who believe they have any such patent.

The usual introductory gossip of the day was exchanged, as a couple of fencers deliver the thrusts of the salute, before falling on guard, and then Heywood at once dropped into attitude, and taking the moment when the Earl had laughed—I almost wrote heartily—at a repartee of the priest's, said,—

“But it is time, my Lord, that I should explain the reasons of my intruding upon you.”

"I had rather not hear them," said the Earl, "because they are entirely unnecessary. I am more obliged to you for that story than I can tell you, and if you were a clergyman who had come to ask me for one of my livings, I should tell you that your business was done. But I suppose we have not succeeded in regaining you to the fold? Or have you any such idea—because I can give you a letter to almost any of the bishops, if you want your scruples removed. Don't look sceptical, and as if I were recommending quack medicine—I have known very surprising cases."

"The result a *cure*?" said Heywood, laughing. "No, such is not my ambition, at this moment, at any rate. I fear I must bore your Lordship with a fact or two."

"As distinguished from the assertions of theology. What an irreverent sentiment, Mr. Heywood! However, pray proceed, and be assured that I shall not be bored with anything you are so good as to tell me."

Heywood bowed slightly, and went on,—

"I am the guardian of a young Catholic lady, a Miss Trevelyan, whose name your Lordship may possibly have heard."

"One of the family who lost the Aspen Court estates, in the suit with the Wilmslows, I suppose," said the Earl, who was sitting in the same chair wherein he had spoken to Carlyon about "the priest and his niece" being responsible for the condition of little Amy.

"You have heard of her?" urged Heywood. "Possibly through Mr. Bernard Carlyon."

"I do not remember whether he ever mentioned the young lady's name to me, or not. Is he interested in her? In that case I suppose I forestall your revelation by supposing that, as her guardian, you come to ask me what I think of the young gentleman's prospects, which I have forwarded a good deal." It is needless to remark that the Earl supposed nothing of the kind.

"I have no such object," replied the priest. "I was aware that you had been very kind to Mr. Carlyon, but I had supposed that a union at which I hinted the other night—at Lady Rotherhithe's, I think—had influenced your patronage."

"Oh, you fancied *that*?" said the Earl, with an affectation of

surprise. "Nothing o. the kind. I thought him an able and a meritorious young man ; I assisted him, and he has vindicated my judgment by distinguishing himself. Selwyn has given him the secretaryship to the Salvages and Contingencies, with a salary of a thousand a-year."

"It was not of him that I had any intention of speaking," said Heywood.

"I think that it was you who first mentioned his name, not I," said the Earl, smiling.

"Was it?" said Heywood, carelessly. "It was, however, of my ward that I intended to speak. My acquaintance with your Lordship is not old, and is slight, but the circumstances of the case must excuse any apparent singularity in what I am going to say. It is not worth while for me to ask your Lordship that our interview may be a confidential one, for it certainly will be so if I succeed in my object, and if I fail, I am in the hands of an English nobleman."

"To show you how disposed I am to be frank," said the Earl, "your first alternative is sensible enough—but I gather from the second, that you mean to tell me nothing but what you suppose I know already."

"You will judge for yourself," said Heywood, who was not inclined to be hurried. "You are no doubt aware, being a frequent visitor to Aspen Court, that, though the Trevellyans were dispossessed by a decision of a court of law, they never acquiesced in the justice of that decision."

"Defeated defendants do not make that a practice, I have heard," said Lord Rookbury. "But it would have given a livelier colour to their dissatisfaction if they had appealed, and had been beaten through our House before giving in."

"That may be," said Heywood, not desirous to meet the question conveyed in the remark, "but such was not the course they were advised to take. Well, the successful parties took possession, and there they are."

"And there, I suppose, they are likely to remain," said Lord Rookbury.

"Unless your Lordship turns them out," said the priest.

"A singular observation," replied Lord Rookbury. There was a pause of some moments, but as it was clearly Heywood's turn to speak, he said, at last,—

"We have, I believe, arrived at the conclusion of the Wilmslow story, thus far."

"My dear Mr. Heywood," said the Earl, "I will once more repeat to you that I propose to be frank, and therefore I beg to object to my being asked to give information, instead of my receiving it, as was kindly proposed at the outset."

"I will spare your Lordship the trouble," said the other. "The present holder of Aspen Court is a profligate spendthrift—I would apologise to you for applying such words to your friend, but I see that it is unnecessary. You are supplying him with large sums of money for the sake of securing a hold upon the estate, and, in order, as you hoped, to gain the wife's assent to your scheme, you made a proposal of marriage to one of the daughters, which, I presume I may say, you had as much idea of ever fulfilling as I have of asking for another of the young ladies."

"You have taken some pains to inform yourself of facts, and shown some ingenuity in arguing from them, Mr. Heywood," said the Earl. "Do you expect me to say more?"

"Allow me to proceed, my Lord, because at the present stage my observations sound very like impertinence."

"At least," said the Earl of Rookbury.

"I do not despair of having them excused," said the priest. "Your Lordship has, I beg to say, been throwing away a good deal of money, from the simple circumstance that you are unaware of the real position of Mr. Wilmslow. You have supposed him to be the owner of the estates, when, in fact, they have long since passed from him, he being merely the puppet of the wealthy attorney, who gained the suit for him, Mr. Molesworth."

"Suppose, Mr. Heywood, that I were at least as well informed upon this subject as you appear to be."

"My Lord, you were *not* a minute ago. You tried your utmost to learn the truth from Bernard Carlyon, but you did not succeed—nay," he continued, for the Earl deemed it necessary to put on a fierce frown, "I merely observe that you were as unsuccessful as myself, for before you knew Mr. Carlyon I had myself endeavoured, by every means, to get him to divulge what I am assured is well known to him. Pooh!" said Heywood, whose perfect fearlessness was one of his best points, "any

simulation of anger at hearing the truth is unworthy of your Lordship's intellect. We are alone, and I am a clergyman. If we are to play a farce, I throw up my part." And the speaker's noble features showed something of the contempt he felt for mere hypocrisy.

The Earl looked hard at him for some moments, and, as if he were really playing the farce spoken of, the words "peer of the realm"—"dishonourable devices"—"unworthy motives"—"imputations borne in silence"—came from his lips mechanically. Then, suddenly recovering his natural manner, he said shortly, and almost snappishly,—

"Supposing all said which ought to be said, and which I reserve a right to say, what next?"

"Ah!" said Heywood, but without betraying any other evidence of satisfaction. "The next thing is this. Miss Trevelyan's friends have at length obtained information which will enable them once more to act in her behalf. I purposely use guarded words. But they designed to act against other parties than the Earl of Rookbury."

"I understand," said the Earl. "They have no purse to measure against that kept at Rookton Woods."

"That is not the consideration—it would have been, in the absence of less precise information than we have; but what we possess entitles us—entitles me—to draw upon resources to which those of Rookton Woods are nothing."

"In plainer English, Mr. Heywood, you know enough to justify you in asking the Catholic interest to come forward and rescue Aspen Court."

"Wealthy friends will not be found wanting to Miss Trevelyan. But again I must remark that money is not the consideration. The steps we should take are comparatively inexpensive ones."

"Then you don't appeal, that's clear."

"We shall strike higher, no offence to your Lordship's House."

"At Molesworth. Come, I can't have that called striking higher. The attorneys are the masters of the House of Commons, and can whip them up, or stave them off, as they please, but not so with us."

"Let me retract, then. But your Lordship perceives my meaning."

"Well, Sir," said the Earl, "as a legislator and a philanthropist I must naturally rejoice at seeing a lawyer brought to justice, and I wish you all success. But why you should favour me with this early and singular revelation of your plans, I do not as yet understand."

"Because," said Heywood, unprovoked, provoking as was the tone, "your Lordship has set your heart upon Aspen Court."

"And if I have," said the Earl, arrogantly, "you may be well sure, my dear Mr. Heywood, that I shall attain my object, quite independently of Catholic clergymen, sane or otherwise, needy heiresses and dishonest attorneys."

"Your Lordship's tone is unlucky," said Heywood, with a calm *hauteur*, his magnificent eyes fixed full on Lord Rookbury's face. "If I needed other evidence than I possess that you have not, in vulgar phrase, a leg to stand on, I should find it in the irritation which I have caused, by telling you what you did not know. Even your Lordship's admirable self-command, proof against minor assaults, such as imputations on your straightforward dealing, and trifles of that kind, gives way at the discovery that you have lost your money, lost it, too, to such a coarse bungler as Henry Wilmslow."

"Well, Sir," said the Earl, "I am an old man, and you are a priest, so we will not exchange sarcasms. What is it that you have to propose to me?"

"I propose to hear what your Lordship means to do to recover the money you have lost."

"Really. But, even supposing that I had advanced and had lost money, the rest seems to be my affair."

"Entirely, and if your Lordship signifies to me that such is the way in which you regard it, I have only to thank you for a very agreeable interview, and to wish you good morning."

Lord Rookbury saw, first, that he had been driven into a *cul-de-sac*, by the superior generalship of the Jesuit, or rather by his superior resources, and secondly, that it was not of the least use for him to fly into another rage. So, as wise politicians always do, he accepted the situation, and replied,—

"We have said so much that we may as well say a little more. What you have stated as to my connexion with the Wimsloes is known to too many people for it to be worth my while to contra-

dict you, except that I beg you to understand that you have been misinformed as to the relations between myself and the eldest Miss Wilmslow, a subject, however, with which you can have no concern. Your position and character are sufficient guarantee to me that, in regard to the ownership of Aspen Court, you believe what you assert, and I have information of my own upon the same subject. Possibly I have advanced my money in spite of the circumstances to which you allude."

A bridge of gold for a flying enemy, thought Heywood. "Then I mistake," he said, "in supposing that you would object to some more negotiable security than the bonds of Mr. Wilmslow."

"I am not so unbusiness-like," said the Earl, "but you know there are occasions when bad securities are better than good ones. Forged bills are taken up, to the hour."

"Does Wilmslow forge bills?" asked Heywood, gravely.

"I hope not," said the Earl; "but, though he is my friend, I really cannot say. That, however, was not what I meant; but let it pass. You propose to give me a better security. What do you wish me to do for you?"

"To fight our battle," said the priest quietly.

"To regain Aspen Court for the young Catholic lady. Well, your proposal is bold and considerate, if you believe——"

"That your Lordship desires to obtain the estate?"

"Precisely."

"Not so inconsiderate, if your Lordship will grant two propositions, to the truth of both of which I pledge myself,—first, that it is utterly impossible for you to succeed without us, and secondly, that the property may come into your family if you join us. Two other considerations may be worth naming—first, that your money, now utterly lost, shall be repaid; and next, that what is proposed to you shall not cost your Lordship one shilling."

"Four points worthy of all meditation. A fifth is—why am I to be the champion? If you can win your battle, why not fight it for yourselves and throw me over?"

"Because this is a Protestant country."

"Is it?—so it is. But what difference does that make?"

"Molesworth is a most respectable Protestant solicitor. The Wilmslows are Protestants. We are Catholics, who desire to

wrench a large estate out of the hands of one party, and to make the other disgorge his gains in disgrace. I do not say that I am afraid of injustice, but everything is against us. Let a Protestant peer enter the lists, and the chances of the Protestant attorney and his clients will be frightfully reduced."

"That may be," said the Earl, musing. "But supposing I listened to the proposal, I do not see how the plan can be accomplished. The estate may not be Molesworth's, or Wilmslow's, or yours, but it certainly is not mine. When shall you be prepared with details?"

"This is Tuesday—on Thursday, after the post is in."

"Will you see me here on that day, say at twelve? I will give you my answer then."

Heywood was hardly out of the square before Lord Rookbury had rung for the "Court Guide," had sworn a dozen ugly oaths because it was not the latest edition, and had looked out the address of Messrs. Molesworth and Penkridge.

CHAPTER XLIII.

SIGNS.

THE Earl's letter to Henry Wilmslow procured for Mr. Rockbrook and Bernard Carlyon as gracious a reception at Aspen Court as the Ambassador's nature could accord. The former was understood to be a friend of the Earl's, and desirous to inspect the famous old house in the West.

The ladies were all at home, and Carlyon was received by three of them with their usual cordiality; nor would a stranger's eye have detected in Kate's more reserved feeling and colder smile anything more than the difference of external manner often found among sisters whose feelings are in unison. Even Bernard himself did not notice that Kate took some care not to be left in *tête-à-tête* conversation with him; for it was by adroitly bringing one or other of her sisters to her side, rather than by leaving him, that she avoided any possible confidences. He might, perhaps, have been more sharp-sighted, but that the errand on which he had come turned the current of his thoughts in another direction.

The travellers had come down by the night mail train, and reached Aspen Court in time for the family breakfast. Mr. Rockbrook had, therefore, an opportunity of leisurely observing the condition of Amy. Her seat was, as usual, by her mother's side, to which she seemed to nestle, occasionally laying her fair head back upon Mrs. Wilmslow's shoulder, and evincing a lassitude from which she evidently aroused herself by effort when the old, merry spirit came over her, and she could not resist the pleasure of launching a little playful taunt at her friend Bernard. His visit pleased and excited her; and it was plain to him, and to Mr. Rockbrook, that her mother and sisters were surprised at an unwonted display of spirits on the child's part. The brown eyes lighted up with merriment, and the brown curls waved as the saucy answer was given; but the excitement was as transitory as unusual. Rockbrook, after a searching glance or two, seemed to observe Amy no longer, and conversed during the rest of the breakfast with Mrs. Wilmslow, to whose ear his grave and kind voice came with a welcome tone, reminding her of days when she heard such voices less seldom.

The conversation turned upon foreign travel, of which the physician had seen a good deal, and spoke well and pointedly, neither attempting to startle by paradoxical stories, nor succeeding in boring by quotations from road-books.

"Did you go down into the catacombs, when you were in Paris, Sir?" said Amy, suddenly sitting up.

"No, my dear," said Rockbrook. "There is considerable difficulty in obtaining permission to do so."

"I should like to be taken *there*," murmured Amy, in a low voice.

"I could show you some much more agreeable things in Paris," said Mr. Rockbrook, smiling.

"Yes, but I should like to have seen the catacombs," said Amy, in the same tone, and closing her eyes, as she once more reclined upon her mother's shoulder. Carlyon even fancied that Amy was picturing to herself the scene she had spoken of, and that a shudder for an instant convulsed her, but the demonstration, if it were made, was so momentary, that he could scarcely assure himself that he had seen it.

The breakfast over, it was proposed that the whole party *should stroll* through the garden and grounds around the house.

Wilmslow, with his usual attention to the proprieties of life, begged to be excused, having something important to attend to, and his excuses were received so easily, that he had no particular reason to feel much complimented. He departed, and the ladies arranged to meet Mr. Rockbrook and Carlyon in the garden, and in the meantime Bernard offered to show his friend the fine old hall. Rockbrook's survey was soon made—the portraits had little attraction for him, and he vouchsafed slight attention to the swords and carabines and pikes—but over the quaint and disordered old clock, with its various contrivances for indicating all kinds of things, but everyone disarranged, and in the barometer which had once run round it like a great red vein, but was now bloodless, the physician lingered with some interest. It was a machine out of sorts, and amid such machinery lay his business. The clock's place was near the large red curtain which covered the opening leading to the interior of the house, and Bernard, who had awaited Rockbrook's pleasure to speak as to Amy, was about to conduct him to the garden by that way, when the physician stopped him.

"I would give something for this affair," he said. "I suppose they would not part with it."

"Cure little Amy, and the house is yours from hearthstone to roof-tree," said Carlyon.

"There was no use in bringing me down," said the physician, gravely.

"What!" said Bernard, agitated, despite the preparation he had received in his interview with Lord Rookbury. "Is the case hopeless?"

"She is dying under their eyes—and rapidly. My dear Bernard, if I could lay my hand upon this machinery, and at a touch call it into instant and harmonious action, it would not be such a miracle as my prolonging that child's life for two months. If her mother—what a dear, good woman that is, Bernard—if she is blind to the state of things, it is wonderful, but one sees such wonders in the course of practice. I doubt whether she ought to be told."

"Yes, she ought," said Carlyon slowly. "Poor, dear little Amy."

"Ah, you love the child? You have known her? Yes, she

might easily become very dear to one. Bah ! do not be ashamed of tears in your eyes."

"I am not," said Bernard, quietly. "But, as I said, Mrs. Wilmslow must be informed of this. I came down to do it, but as we talked, and you spoke of strange cures, I seemed to acquire hope that I might be spared the work."

"The only fitting person to break such news to a mother is her husband," said the physician, "but as to entrusting such a duty to that coarse, shouting, stupid fellow——"

"If he had a spark of feeling," said Bernard, "I would almost risk the rest—she has been his wife for years, and her sense is deadened to what we feel so offensive. But he has no heart, and, in short, Henry Wilmslow is a brute."

And Henry Wilmslow, skulking within twelve inches of the speakers, ground his teeth viciously on the other side of the curtain.

"I know the pain it will give you, Carlyon," said his friend. "I am more accustomed to deal with such revelations, and from feeling somewhat less acutely than yourself, I shall be able to break the intelligence more cautiously. You had better let me do it."

"So it shall be, then," said Bernard, sorrowfully. "Ah ! there they are in the front. Let us go out this way."

"I shall not speak to Mrs. Wilmslow on the subject during our walk," said the physician, "unless a very favourable opportunity offers, so do not fear a scene. I shall rather endeavour to understand her character a little, and then I shall better see in what way to call her attention to her daughter's condition."

"Her character is on the surface," said Bernard, "and is told in two words—duty and affection."

"Possibly you are right," said Mr. Rockbrook, "but I think—at least, it is equally possible—that there may be something beneath the surface. However, let us join them, and, as far as you can, leave her to me."

Carlyon opened the large door of the hall, and they went out that way, and joined the ladies.

Henry Wilmslow went up to his private chamber with a strange mixture of feelings, all of them bad, but some worse than others. This man, once "a little too gay," had been degenerating and demoralizing ever since the time we introduced him to the

reader. "God made the country, and man made the town," says a poet, in a line of no great meaning, and with such meaning as it possesses pointing to a false inference. A bad man (and we have unhappily to do with one at this moment) becomes worse in the country, where his pleasures are limited and coarse, and where he is compelled to spend hours in miserable self-communing, than in a city, where vice runs in a constant current, and where he can escape from solitude and thought. It is untrue to allege that country life is favourable even to morality—to the "gentler morals" it has long ceased to lay claim. The most dangerous treatment to which you can expose an evil nature, is that species of solitary confinement called retirement from a large town; simply, and logically, for the same reason that such a life is favourable to a virtuous nature. Nothing new is put in, but what is there develops, either for good or for evil. Town life stunts the vice it seems to nourish.

He went up to his room, as we have said, in a most evil state of mind. He had heard that his child must die. This news would, perhaps, have troubled him once, at the time that his pretty little Amy was his plaything, and one that everybody admired; but those days were long past. There was as complete an estrangement between himself and his children as the duty their mother had taught them permitted. I doubt if her father's lips had touched Amy's for months. I hope not. She and her sisters were glad to escape from his presence, from his ill-conditioned scoffing, his swearing, and his hard, unkind manner; and he cared nothing for them. What he had heard about Amy, therefore, gave him no pain. But he had heard what seemed to him of much more importance. He learned that a secret had been kept from him, a deception practised, and that his patron and friend had taken his special enemy into league; and when Wilmslow imagined that his own interests were being studied, the only thing in question was the state of a sick girl. Injured, therefore, and insulted, Henry Wilmslow at once declared himself. Added to this, with the proverbial ill-fortune of listeners, he had heard the courtly physician, who had not passed an hour in his company, declare him a coarse, stupid fellow; and the judgment had been confirmed by Carlyon, who had called him a heartless brute. "They go away from my table," said the Ambassador, with a curse, "to talk of me in that

manner." And then he began to drink brandy, solitary tipping being one of the country enjoyments which he had learned to appreciate.

Meantime, Mrs. Wilmslow and the party below proceeded on their walk, Mr. Rockbrook, as he had proposed, keeping near to Jane, and Carlyon endeavouring to draw away the girls out of earshot. Amy, indeed, placed herself upon his arm at once, saying that she was glad to see him return to the path of his duty to her, and that she was willing to overlook the past, and treat him as one of the family. Emma also was glad to hear what Bernard had to say; but Kate, except when summoned by her sisters to be told something which had amused them, lingered by her mother's side, and somewhat impeded the cautious advance by which the physician designed to win the confidence of Mrs. Wilmslow. They went over the gardens, Bernard, with a heavy heart, endeavouring to entertain his companions, and almost at every step reminded of his mission by the clinging and dependent way in which the frail form of poor Amy rested upon his arm.

In the course of their walk they visited the grass-grown garden in the rear of the house, and, as they entered it, Amy pointed out to Bernard the statue of Phocion.

"I can look at that quite comfortably now, Bernard," she said, "but I only broke myself into doing so by often coming out here alone, while Emmy and Kate thought I was asleep, and accusing myself to it. Even now, there are times when I fancy the statue looks maliciously at me. Do you remember my horror at it on the great skeleton day?"

"I meant to forget all about it," said Carlyon, "and I hoped you had long since done so. We should forget painful things."

"I could not forget it, Bernard, and at last I made up my mind that it was intended that I should not. As soon as I was convinced of that, of course it would have been wicked in me to try, and therefore I made a practice of visiting that skeleton room every day, about the hour at which we first made our way there."

"Why did they allow you to do so?" said Carlyon, half reproachfully, but at the moment Emma was out of hearing.

"Do not scold them—they knew nothing of it," said Amy, *confidentially*. "I kept it secret, not that it was wrong, but

because they would have been vexed. Indeed, I knew that it was not wrong, because several times I had a sign given me. My dear Bernard, how you started."

"Did I?" said Carlyon, who felt a cold damp upon his very heart, as the loving gentle thing on his arm gave this unmis-takeable evidence that something worse than bodily disease had been busy with her.

"Perhaps that is a sign, too," mused Amy.

He pressed her slight arm to his side. At another time he would only have tried to dispel her foolish thought with a jest, but his lips refused to utter one. She talked idly, but she was dying.

"You do not speak—you do not ask me what my sign was!" the poor child went on. "I have not told the girls, but you have a right to know, because you took the skeleton down and sat in its chair. Well, I know that you pulled it all to pieces, and tied all the bones up in a tight bundle, and locked them up in one of the old closets; but all that did not prevent its giving me a sign when I needed one. I went in one day, shut the door, and stood exactly where I was when we first saw the apparition. There was a silence for a minute, and then all the bones in the closet began to rattle."

"My darling child," said Bernard, passionately, "you must not talk so wildly. There is not a bone of the skeleton left in the house. I packed it, as you say, and threw it into the closet for the moment, but when I left Aspen Court, I took it away with me to London."

"That is strange, Bernard," she said, looking up with a smile. "Are you quite sure?"

"Dear child, quite sure. I had it put together again by a medical friend, and it hangs in his room, near Cavendish Square."

"Then it must be some other skeleton that made me the sign, Bernard, and we did not half search the room. That is very strange."

"My dearest Amy, you *must* believe what I tell you. There is no skeleton within miles of Aspen Court."

"Bernard, you are very good to me generally, though rather neglectful, but I shall scold you if you tell stories. *There* is our church with dozens of them lying about, just under our feet,

especially the poor little child's, whom the wicked woman frightened to death, and which they say starts about in its little grave even now, while her spirit walks about, as the poor thing did in its cot, when she dressed up horrid figures to terrify it. I mean to be buried close to that child, the little thing will be quiet when I am there."

"Have you told this to mamma, Amy?" said Bernard, in a low voice.

"No. She is not strong, dear thing, and she cannot very well bear anything startling. Though it is silly of people to be startled at skeletons, because if she comes to think, here is one at my very elbow. What starting again! I mean your own, of course. Is not a skeleton walking about wherever anybody walks?"

Bernard felt that the presence of another person who should divert Amy from the subject on every phase of which she had been evidently brooding, was a relief he must have, and he drew her towards the others, who were nearer the house.

"Is that—but of course it is—the Severn in the distance?" said Mr. Rockbrook.

"Yes," said Mrs. Wilmslow, "you see the water plashing through the weir. Katie, dear, fetch the telescope—I think it is in the library. There are several points in our landscape worth a stranger's notice, if, as a foreign traveller, you care for English scenery, Mr. Rockbrook. Why, Amy, darling, where is all your colour gone? Has Bernard been telling you some terrible story?"

"In one sense he has, mamma; that is, he has told a terrible falsehood, but he is penitent, and I forgive him. My goodness, what is the matter with Kate! Talk of colour—she is as white as a ghost."

Kate just then reappeared from the house, bringing the telescope, and assuredly justifying Amy's description. She was evidently making a desperate struggle at self-command, and she placed the glass, as if mechanically, in her mother's hand.

"I—I slipped," she said, "on the stairs. I am not at all hurt, but shaken—frightened. It is nothing. I assure you, it is nothing, mamma," she said, almost impatiently, under Mrs. Wilmslow's anxious look. Kate stood quite still until, her assurances apparently satisfying her mother, the latter began

to point out the features in the landscape. Amy had sat down upon a garden seat. Then Kate, to Bernard's surprise, laid her hand on his arm, and made a gesture that she must speak to him apart. They proceeded a few steps from the rest of the party.

"There is no time for more than one word. Is that a doctor, and is Amy dying?"

"Yes," said Bernard.

Her hand clutched upon his arm, and he felt her tremble violently, but she mastered her agitation, and said, in a hasty and imploring voice, "Tell mamma—you tell her, for God's sake—*now*."

Bernard guessed all, sprang to Mrs. Wilmslow's side, and made an imperative sign to Rockbrook, unperceived by her, that he must instantly make his communication. The ready-witted physician understood him, and without comprehending the emergency of the case, offered his arm to his hostess, with a request that she would permit him to say a word or two. Jane, gentle as ever, took his arm, though with some surprise, but they had scarcely turned from the others when a strong hand was laid upon her shoulder, and her husband stood among them. He was excited by liquor, but in the perfect possession of his faculties, and his face, bloated by low debauchery, bore a savage expression, which, as it seemed to Carlyon at the moment, would have justified him in felling Wilmslow to the ground.

"Ah! I'm in time, I see," he said, as Jane, in her habitual effort to screen her husband's vices, forced a smile, and tried to frame some playful words to help him to excuse his rudeness. The smile told him that she had not heard the fatal news.

"One word with you, Mr. Wilmslow," said Carlyon, dashing in as a last chance, for he saw Henry's intention. "I have a message to you from Lord Rookbury. Just come and hear it—a secret from the ladies."

"In—deed," returned Wilmslow, looking at him with an insolent scowl. "I'll hear it at my leisure, Mr. Secretary Carlyon, Sir. What I have to say, is what this gentleman says that a mother ought to hear from her husband. I believe those were your words, Sir. I was afraid that my daughter might have forestalled me."

"Take her away," said Bernard to Rockbrook.

"At your peril, Sir," shouted Wilmslow, seizing his wife by the arm. "I have only to inform you, Mrs. Wilmslow," he said, in a drawling, malicious voice, "that this gentleman is a London doctor, brought down by that gentleman to see your youngest daughter, and his report is, that she is dying, and can't live two months."

All eyes turned to seek Amy, who retained her seat at the foot of the old tree, but the mother was the first to clasp her in her arms.

"I knew it," said Amy quietly. "I thought you all knew it. Oh, yes, I am dying!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

"AND TAKE MY MILK FOR GALL."



OUR days later, Mrs. Wilmslow was announced to Mr. Molesworth, the lawyer, as he sat in his office in London, meditating various matters, and among them the probable and possible results of a curious interview he had that morning had with the Earl of Rookbury.

"Instantly, of course," said Molesworth, surprised, and, contrary to his usual habit, rising and coming out to meet his client. For his custom was to allow his visitors to enter his room before he rose to receive them. He thus obtained, under the somewhat strong light which fell upon the doorway, an excellent view of the expression upon their faces. In ninety-nine cases out of one hundred this view was not of the slightest value—in the hundredth it might afford him a hint, and, therefore, like a practical man, Molesworth secured the one chance in a hundred.

"My dear Mrs. Wilmslow," he said, taking her two hands in his own, in token of his exceeding satisfaction, and bringing her into the room—"this *is* an unexpected pleasure. At home to nobody, Galton, and mind I have no messages," he added, as that erring, but penitent porter retired. "And how are all the dear little people? Radiant and rosy with the fresh air of Gloucestershire, of course. Fine thing fresh air."

"The elder ones are well—the younger is not," said Jane Wilmslow, in the voice in which one disposes of a question asked as a formality.

Such had not been Jane Wilmslow's habitual way of replying to any inquiry about her children, for her motherly heart had taken a long time to learn that any one who knew them could speak of them quite as he spoke of yesterday's rain or to-day's sunshine. But her tone was as passionless as if she were answering a remark on the weather. It was not lost upon Molesworth, who instantly looked at her with attention, and was conscious of a change which he might have found it difficult to define. It was not that the face was sad—he had often seen it much sadder when the poor wife had hastened to him for aid for Wilmslow in his days of folly and dissipation. But, if so womanly a face as Jane's could be conceived to have hardened, that process represented what, as it seemed to the lawyer, had taken place.

Jane bore with, rather than listened to, his happiness at hearing that Emma and Kate were well, with his sorrow that Amy was ill, with his hope for the continuance of the one state of things and the termination of the other, and with his trust that she herself was invigorated by a country life, and these considerations naturally led him to an inquiry as to Henry Wilmslow. He had accompanied her to town, no doubt. No? ungallant husband!

Cutting short the lawyer in his lively observations, Mrs. Wilmslow said,—

"Your time is valuable, Mr. Molesworth, and I will trespass upon it only so long as is necessary."

"Pray do not speak in that cold tone, Jane," said Molesworth, "it is so unlike old times. Why should you?"

"Because old times are gone," said Jane, deliberately.

"To make way for better ones, we will hope," replied Molesworth, with something of soothing in his voice, for he saw that Mrs. Wilmslow had sustained some new wrong—and he instantly and instinctively carried it to the right account.

"I have not seen you," said Jane, disregarding his last speech, "since the day when you furnished us with funds to go down to Aspen Court."

"Furnished them for the second time, I think," said Moles-

worth, not unwilling to aid her expected revelation by supplying her with a recollection of Wilmslow's heartlessness.

"You have our affairs in your hands," said Jane, "and, I trust, have taken care of your own interests. I should be sorry to think you were the loser by any assistance rendered to us in our difficulties."

"I do not see what she is driving at," thought Molesworth. "Was that a hint that she understood matters? Let her go on."

"I owe you much," continued Mrs. Wilmslow, "very much."

"Do not speak of obligations," he replied, with something like a touch of feeling: "I have always found pleasure in being of any service to you—and, perhaps," he added, not untruthfully, "I have *not* been a loser in other ways."

"I know that you have not," returned Jane, quietly, "and that, if all goes on according to your wish, you will be a larger gainer by us."

"A prelude to some heavy demand," said the attorney to himself. "What has that beast in the country been doing now? Forging, perhaps—he is too great a coward to be a house-breaker. Let us hear."

"But I did not allude to money," said Jane. "I owe you my marriage."

This was an acknowledgment which Molesworth had certainly not expected, and it must be admitted that he looked the astonishment that he felt. He had been silent before, from choice, but he now held his tongue from not knowing how to use it with advantage, and in his embarrassment he made a slight bow, which might be interpreted to mean anything.

"I owe you my marriage," repeated Jane.

"We—we acted as we thought for the best, at the time, my dear friend," said the lawyer, compelled to speak. "Things did not take the course we had hoped they would, but it could hardly be said to be our fault, and, at all events, it is too late to look back. We should rather make the best of the future."

"It is well," said Jane, "that you do not still endeavour to persuade me, or pretend to think you can persuade me, that all *was* for the best, and that in introducing and recommending to

me a husband whom you knew to be an irretrievably bad man, you were doing me a kindness."

In all Jane Wilmslow's troubled life Molesworth had never heard her so speak of her husband.

"I see," said he, "that you have been again wounded—out-raged—and, under such circumstances, I should be ashamed to remind you that you use unkind language towards me. I deplore your marriage—I have not ceased to do so for many a long day; and I think I have given better proof than mere words that I have sought, by assisting you through life (I mention it only because you compel it) to make some amends for my original error."

"Error?" repeated Jane, in a low voice. "The word by which a man describes his having doomed a woman to a life of shame and grief."

"You did not come to London to taunt me with an error—well, an injury—of twenty years ago?"

"I came to say what I have said," replied she. "I have had much cause for bitterness, but never so much as now."

And, in a few words, delivered with a forced calmness, and with a strange precision, she told the story of the medical visit, and its termination—precision, that made it seem as if she were repeating a conned lesson. Let those be thankful who have never had a sorrow which incessantly formed itself into a given set of words, dulling themselves by recurrence, and becoming a formula of grief whence it was new pain to depart.

Man's indignation sometimes relieves itself in a savage curse, but seldom in so savage a one as Molesworth ground out between his teeth, as he heard the sequel to the story.

When, in other days, Jane came to him to ask assistance for her husband, and an angry condemnation of Wilmslow's follies would break from Molesworth, she would protest against it, and seem wounded, and he always apologised before they parted. He had now invoked upon Wilmslow a doom too fearful to be written down here (I know not in how much of its possibility Molesworth believed), and Mrs. Wilmslow gazed steadily at him without a sign of deprecation.

"It is easy, I know," she said, after a pause, "for men to use words at which one's very soul shudders. I have heard such words since my marriage. I know how much they mean. If

you meet my husband in the street this afternoon, you will shake his hand, and laugh when you part with him. I should not blame you—it is the way with men.”

“You are right, Jane,” said Molesworth, “quite right. Curses are folly, and ask folly. But,” he added, in a low voice, “we can do something in this world—something—something.” And he rose and gazed intensely into one of his pictures after the other, seeing no line in any of them—we once before noticed his habit, when in doubt. Jane remained silent till he returned to his chair. He looked at her for some moments, and then he said,

“Your friend, the Earl of Rookbury, sat in that chair two hours ago. He did not tell me a word of his sending down Carlyon and the surgeon.”

“He meant it in kindness,” said Jane. “Bernard Carlyon, who does not judge him indulgently, assures me that Lord Rookbury showed sincere feelings when speaking of Amy. But wrong never comes right. They told us a falsehood, Mr. Rockbrook deceived us, and you have heard of the miserable end of the story. They should have written to me, and let me know the truth. I could have borne it so, and then the frightful shock would have been spared me. But my suffering is nothing. It is no thought of that which brings me to town to-day. I now stand between my children and their father, and for their sake I am here.”

“You have some proposition of your own? I will assist you to the utmost in carrying it out, unless I can suggest a better.”

“Mr. Molesworth, I am utterly helpless. I have not even the strength which knowledge of my position gives. I do not know at this instant whether Aspen Court is yours, mine, or—another’s,” said Jane, checking herself.

“Or Lord Rookbury’s, you mean,” said Molesworth. “You suspect, if you do not know, what is going on. I have not been altogether blind to it. But let me hear you to the end.”

“You have supplied me with the means of living—of late you have done so liberally,” said Jane, “but whether we are rich or poor, whether your supplies are our right or your charity, I have no means of knowing.”

“You shall have no cause to complain of my keeping *you* in the dark,” said Molesworth, “while your interest, through your

indulgence and forbearance, remained the same with that of—Mr. Wilmslow—we will call no more names—you will see that I could best act for your interests by troubling you with as little as possible that he could learn from you. Now, unless I mistake your meaning to-day, you and he are—two.”

“Yes—two,” said Jane, with low, but marked emphasis.

“And God knows that juster divorce was never pronounced,” said Molesworth. “But the children, as you say. Your desire is—”

“To remove them from the society of their father, at once, and for ever,” said Jane, with a determination strangely at variance with the gentle bearing of her whole life.

“You are right,” said Molesworth. And again he rose, and went round the room, halting, at intervals, as new points of consideration arose to him.

“Have the whole case before you,” he said, returning. “The custody of the children is his, by right, unless we can show cause why they should be taken from him.”

“Is not his life, since their births, cause enough?” said Jane.

“Morally, no doubt. But we have lost proof of much, and borne with much so long, that unless anything very flagrant could be proved as a reason for a move, at the end of all these years, it would look suspicious. Without asking you any painful question—his vices have, I believe, been practised of late out of your sight and hearing?”

The crimson mounted to the fair forehead of the poor wife as she replied—

“He has treated my feelings more offensively than at Aspen Court, though even there—”

“Never mind,” said Molesworth, “we will discuss such matters only when necessary. I do not think that we could make out a case strong enough for Chancery—that is to say, since Lord Rookbury has become an ally of Mr. Wilmslow, and lends him his purse. Without that aid, I think that I could manage to get the children from him, but the resistance of a beggared libertine, and the resistance of the friend of a rich peer are two things, even in the Court of Chancery. And he *would* resist, no doubt.”

“To the last, for the sake of making me as wretched as he could.”

"No doubt There are other ways, however. I have not been his friend for so many years without being able to offer him various reasons for complying with any reasonable wish of mine. The Rookbury friendship interferes with my influence to a certain extent, but is not all-powerful."

"I had thought," said Jane—"but you will see difficulties perhaps of which I know nothing—that if he could be driven away, frightened away—I scarcely know by what means except fear of debts,—until I could remove the children, and hide them with me in some quiet place on the Continent—we could live upon very little, if there is but little—"

"And leave Aspen Court, your newly won inheritance?" said Molesworth.

"Leave Aspen—everything—everything, to escape from *him!*" said Jane, with energy.

"No," said Molesworth, firmly. "You must not leave Aspen Court. You must remain there, under any circumstances."

"I will *not*," said Jane, passionately. "And if you will not help me—if no recollections—" and she burst, at length, into tears, that forced themselves between the pale fingers, which she pressed upon her poor eyes.

"I will help you to the utmost, by——!" exclaimed Molesworth. "But you must let me help you my own way. I tell you that you must remain at Aspen. That is essential. Indeed, flight would be hopeless, for let Lord Rookbury's suspicions be once aroused, and you would be watched night and day. No—you and the young ladies shall stay at Aspen, but we will rid you of Wilmslow's presence."

"How will you?" Jane began.

"You had better know nothing about it. I tell you frankly, that in the old times I should have locked him up—I have ample power to do that now, but to lock him up, under present circumstances, would only be to have him released by his noble friend. I should obtain my money, but I should lose my object. When do you return to the country—not until you have spent some time with us?"

"To-night," said Mrs. Wilmslow.

"To-night, in that tone, means to-night," said Molesworth, "and, of course, I understand why it should. You will travel by the same train which carries a message from me to Mr. Wilm-

slow, and, reckless fool as he may be, even the Rookbury alliance will not keep him out of London many hours after he hears from me. You will not see him again, if you can make up your mind to remain with Mrs. Molesworth to-night. No? Well, I will not endeavour to detain you."

"I *may* rely upon your word?" said Jane, whose old trustfulness seemed to come back at words of kindness.

"Indeed you may," said Molesworth in a low, determined voice. "Give me three days, and you shall see whether I deceive you in this matter. Now—may I replenish your purse?—I dare say you came off hastily. Can any of my clerks attend you anywhere—execute any commission—?"

He forced some gold and notes upon her, and they parted.

"The scoundrel could not have taken a more convenient opportunity of coming out," said Molesworth, as he stood upon his hearthrug again. "And he shall have it, hot and hot. D—n him!" he added, stabbing the fire vindictively with his poker: "how blue her eyes still are!"

With which apparently inconsequential remark, Mr. Molesworth proceeded to search for certain documents in a small iron safe by his side, and having found them he left the house.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE AMBASSADOR IN TROUBLE.



HENCE the day of the scene in the garden, Henry Wilmslow had felt it more comfortable to himself to keep out of the way of his wife and daughters. The disgust which had been exhibited by the medical man and by Bernard at Henry's conduct upon that occasion, had at first the effect of rendering him more dogged and insulting, but the courage which comes from without ceases with the stimulus; and when his visitors had departed (after a long and private interview with Mrs. Wilmslow), Henry felt all a coward's inclination to make up a quarrel. The discouragement which his awkward advances met, was passive rather than active. His wife, after recovering from her first passionate burst of agony, made little more demonstration, beyond the most assiduous attention to Amy; and when addressed by

Henry, replied with a calmness which his delicate observation and graceful nomenclature recorded as "sulks." The elder girls had of late avoided him as much as they could, without actual rudeness, but in their zeal to minister to the comfort of their sister they disregarded their own, and Wilmslow encountered them more frequently than usual, as they sped about the house on their missions of love. But there was no smile on their faces, no loving little taunt was darted at him, no playful gesture saluted him, no hurried kiss was printed, as they hastily passed their father. For that father, indeed, a child's code of household signals had never been framed, and his very servants had of late met him less gravely than his children. But now, when they came together, it was with an air of constraint that there was no mistaking. The father had reduced his household to the condition of feeling that he was the blot and blotch upon it. Callous, and defiant though he was, he could not fail to see this, and such conscience as he had left to him, putting forth its last struggles, he found it, as we have said, more agreeable to avoid his family than to join it as before. He therefore skulked as much as possible in his own apartment, and, under pretext of illness, ordered his meals to be sent thither. So that Mrs. Wilmslow, who might otherwise have found some difficulty in leaving Aspen Court for her visit to London, had actually departed and returned without his knowledge.

Mr. Molesworth kept his word, and a letter reached Henry Wilmslow a couple of hours after Mrs. Wilmslow had arrived at home. It was written by the firm to which, as has been said in one of our earliest chapters, the less dignified portion of Molesworth's business was entrusted—the house in Clement's Inn, where the "common law" of the aristocratic firm was put out to nurse, and where, indeed, it thrived remarkably, perhaps from being untrammelled by several of the conventions of good breeding which tend to injure vigour. The writer, Mr. Scolper (for Scolper and Blirt), recommended Mr. Wimslow to lose no time in presenting himself in Clement's Inn, and he enforced his advice by an allusion which made Henry turn first hot, and then cold, and which ultimately drove him to his favourite refuge, the brandy-bottle, for comfort. He lost no time in obeying the summons, and was, indeed, not sorry to be relieved, by its peremptoriness, of the task of saying

a word of farewell to his family. Simply leaving word with a servant that he was going to London on business, the Lord of Aspen sneaked round by the stables and down to the village, whence he obtained conveyance to the railway station. The old house must have felt more easy after his departure. Since his memorable entrance, on taking possession, when he had not even the grace to congratulate the woman who had given him all, upon her recovery of her estate, or to lead her to her own hearthstone, with a kiss, not one single act of kindness or goodness had that man done up to the time of his present ignominious flight. Nor had his vices been negative only. He had been brute, libertine, and drunkard, and had generally filled up the interstices between active vice, with coarse act and vulgar speech. But this was the individual to whom fate, Molesworth, and girlish mistake, had consigned the keeping of the happiness of dear Jane Tracy.

At almost any other time Henry Wilmslow would have postponed the immediate business of a journey to town, to the indulgence in a brief round of the amusements from which he had lately been in great measure debarred, but the emergency of the case was too pressing, and the *roue's* nerves, never very firm, had been a good deal shaken. He must have things made pleasant for him, to use his own phrase, before he could sit down and enjoy himself.

If he visited Clement's Inn with any particular hope that the pleasurable operation was about to be performed for him, he must have been considerably disappointed when he took a last glance at the Black Boy and Sundial.

Messrs. Scolper & Blirt's chambers were on a second floor, and Henry, who was evidently expected, was shown into a small inner room, furnished with all the taste and *luxure* usual in such localities. That is to say, there was a rickety old loo-table, with stabbed and spotted green cloth, in the middle of the room, and this, with a couple of new walnut wood chairs, and a lid-less tin box, inscribed *Bolgack's Lunacy*, but used as a coal-scuttle, completed the arrangements for bodily convenience and comfort; while the mind was left to feed upon such suggestions as might arise from examination of a dusty portrait of "Eldon C." and of a sheet of "Rules for the Better Taking of Evidence," nearly all of which rules explained the mode in which certain

costs were to be made out against the victims. Here Henry was detained for nearly two hours. In his good days, he would have swaggered the very souls out of the clerks, had he been kept waiting a tenth part of the time. But his gallant spirit was subdued, and he merely ventured upon occasionally coughing loudly, and grating his chair upon the floor, devices to which nervous persons are known to resort in the hope of accelerating the motions of those for whom they are in waiting.

Mr. Scolper appeared at last. A tall, hungry-looking person, with that pleasant expression of face which seems to imply that you have done the wearer an injury by your last remark, and the sooner you get away the better. He wasted little time in prelude, observing,

"Well, you've come up?"

"Yes," said Henry Wilmslow, in no way soothed by the announcement of this incontrovertible fact. "And now what's to be done?"

"Oh!" grumbled Mr. Scolper, highly displeased already, "it's no use your asking *me* what's to be done. Because, if you ask me, I can't tell you, and I let you know that frankly."

"I wish to do what you think best," said Henry.

"Don't go on like that," returned Mr. Scolper, implacable. "You'll go saying next that I gave you advice what to do, and *that* I'll be hanged if I did, or will. If I were an Old Bailey lawyer I don't say that I could not tell you what to do, but I'm not an Old Bailey lawyer."

"If you sent for me only to tell me all that," said Henry, in his turn growing wrathful, despite his fears, "I think you might have let it alone, that's all."

"You think so, do you?" said Mr. Scolper, looking askance at him. "Well, I dare say that's your opinion. In here, Jones," he cried, to a clerk in the next room, whom he heard replying to a visitor. "We'll hear whether it's this party's opinion."

And Mr. Molesworth, great-coated to the cheek-bones, was conducted into his agent's room. Wilmslow advanced to meet him.

"You'll excuse my keeping my hands in my pockets, it's so cold," said Molesworth, with a nod, and this was all his reply to Henry's salutation. The attorney then crossed the room, *and, refusing* a chair, into which he motioned Scolper, he took up a

position in a corner, with his back against the wall, and with Scolper between him and Mr. Wilmslow. Perhaps it was also because of the cold that he did not remove his hat. Henry did not much like these signs and tokens.

"What does he propose?" said Molesworth, abruptly entering upon the business of the moment.

"Propose, bless you!" returned his agent. "He proposes nothing, and makes it matter of grievous complaint that we took the liberty of calling up a country gentleman from the scene where he diffuses so much happiness among his dependents and all around him. Think we might have let him alone, bless you!"

"That was not what I said," replied Henry, anxious not to be put into a false position at the outset. "What I said was——"

"It does not matter what he said, Mr. Scolper, and as a man of business you are not called upon to waste your valuable time upon rubbish—nor am I. You sent for me to hear some proposal, as I understood you, and I am here to listen to it."

"I do not see, Mr. Molesworth, that you could possibly say anything fairer, or more precisely true and accurate, Sir, if you were to talk till that sundial strikes twenty-four. But there seems no willingness to speak, in some quarters."

"If you mean me, I will be hanged if I have had a chance of speaking yet," said Henry. "I'm snapped up like an infernal alligator," he added, with some little inaccuracy of illustration.

"You'll be snapped up worse than that," retorted Scolper, who felt with indignation that his flight of imagination about the dial had been rather over-trumped by Henry's zoological simile.

"You say in your note," said Henry, "that the party——"

"Now, good heaven and earth," said Mr. Scolper, "what the devil is the use of telling me what I said in my note? Do you think I don't know what I said in my note better than you do, or, if I didn't, that I would not call for my letter-book and peruse an examined copy of it instead of taking it from your memory?"

"If I am correct, Scolper," said Mr. Molesworth, "you wrote him something of this kind—of course I do not commit you to my own words."

"I have no doubt, Sir, that they will be the same as mine," said Scolper. And it would have been very odd had it proved otherwise.

"You apprised him, then, that a bill which he had procured, and which had been discounted by a client of yours upon the faith of representations that the signatures were genuine, had arrived at maturity, and that, upon its being presented, one of the signatures had proved to be a forgery. You added, I think, that if explanations were possible, the sooner they were made the better, as criminal proceedings were contemplated."

"Now, then," said Scolper, suddenly turning to Henry the moment Molesworth had ceased, "you can say whether you received such a letter as that or not, I suppose? That won't hurt you."

"That was the letter," said Wilmslow, doggedly.

"Well, I am glad you will allow that," said Scolper, looking at him as if his determined wickedness were too much for a virtuous man to bear.

"You wrote to me, Mr. Scolper," continued Molesworth, "to say, that as I was the means of this bill passing into your client's hand, I ought to hear any proposal that might be made on the subject."

"I did so, Sir," rejoined the vengeful Scolper; "but I really can only beg your pardon for having brought you here on what I may call a fool's errand. The devil a proposal is made, or likely to be made, so far as I can see. I don't call talking about alligators and rubbish making proposals."

"Molesworth," said Henry, "we have known one another off and on for a good many years, and I must say I do not understand this conduct. We parted quite friendly some months ago, and since then I can't have done anything to offend you, because we have not had any intercourse. There's something up, which I don't understand. Can I say a word in private?"

"In connexion with this business?" demanded Molesworth.

"This and other things."

"Certainly not," said Molesworth. "It is decorous in itself, and due to Mr. Scolper, that he should hear every syllable that is dropped upon the subject."

"I'm sure I don't care, if you don't," replied Henry. "I want

to know, Molesworth, in so many words, what this farce is being played for, and what's to come of it?"

"Your language is quite incomprehensible to me," said Molesworth.

"You understand me fast enough," retorted Henry; "and I repeat that you are playing a farce which, I may say, tit for tat, I don't comprehend. Had I been aware," he proceeded, with some grandeur, a bright idea having struck him, "that this kind of thing was to take place, I should have requested a distinguished friend of mine to accompany me to this meeting. I now regret that I did not."

"Old Rook has been in Clement's Inn in his time," said Scolper.

"I did not mention a name," said Henry, "and I am not in the habit of hearing Lord Rookbury spoken of in terms of that kind."

"If you are coming nothing but alligators and rooks," returned Mr. Scolper, "the sooner we break up the better."

"I have waited as long as I can afford to wait," said Mr. Molesworth. "You will do your duty to your client, Mr. Scolper, as you always do, and I can only hope that, disagreeable as my share in the affair must be, I shall be able to offer in a court of justice explanations which will be satisfactory."

"By Jove," said Henry, incautiously, "knowing what you know, you will never stand up in a court of justice about the bill."

"Knowing what I know, I assuredly shall," said Molesworth. "To what does your observation point, Sir?"

"Do you mean to say, that if that bill comes into court, you will come within twenty miles of it?" cried Henry.

"If I am called as a witness, which I presume Mr. Scolper will find it his duty to make me, I shall go into the witness-box, take the bill in my hand, and, as becomes an honest and an honourable man, shall testify to all I know."

"Well, I don't know," said Henry, "how the sauce that is good for the goose is not to be sauce for the gander."

"Could you oblige us with any more animals?" jerked out Mr. Scolper, who had not forgiven the alligator. "Rooks were the last—now come geese and ganders. I suppose we shall have electrifying eels next."

"Mr. Wilmslow's implication becomes too serious for jesting," said Molesworth, rising from the wall, against which he had been leaning, and taking off his hat. "Will you explain, Sir, what you mean by that last speech?"

"I mean this," said Henry, "that if the signature to that bill was forged—mind, I don't say it was—you are not going to get me to say anything of that sort in the presence of a witness; but if it was, you, Mr. Molesworth, knew that it was as well as—as anybody else did, and advanced the money upon it with that knowledge. Deny it, if you dare?"

"My denial to such a person as yourself," said Molesworth, "would be absurd. Luckily the foul calumny is uttered in Mr. Scolper's presence; and I will ask him to note the words."

"Then," said Henry, infuriated, "while you are taking notes, add this: namely, that I, being desperately hard up for money, came to Molesworth, who was managing the Aspen Court suit, and asked him to let me have some. He told me to bring him a bill with one good name on it. I couldn't do that, for I'd pumped out everybody whom I could think of. He suggested my relations. I told him I had none, except a couple of rich cousins who hated me like poison, because my old aunt, Albreda, left me her tin instead of them. Molesworth, let him deny it if he can, said that he had no doubt I could obtain one of their signatures. I was thunderstruck, Sir. I knew that either Frederic or William Barnstaple would as soon have chopped off his right hand as sign to help me. He laughed, and said that if I brought the signature of one of them, there was the money; and he trickled a whole lot of sovereigns through his fingers into a drawer. I suppose you'll say you haven't got a drawer next?" said Henry, pausing in his narrative.

"I have many drawers," replied Molesworth, without moving a muscle.

"I'm glad you'll admit that," said Henry. "Well, I'll tell it you all out now I'm about it. I couldn't think for a long time what he meant; but I knew I wanted the money most devilishly, and, perhaps, being so sharp set, and hearing the clink, made me guess at his aim, and I threw out a feeler or so; saying, in a laughing way, that if I used the freedom of a relative, and *borrowed my cousin's name without asking leave, I supposed*

that would do. He answered, in his sanctimonious way, that he had known me too long to think of questioning any document I might bring him."

"The whole story is false," said Molesworth; "but I admit that such would have been my answer to any one who spoke of you. I knew you for a libertine and a gambler; but I did not for a moment believe that you would be guilty of forgery."

"Now mark this, then," said Henry. "I said that I would go out and get a stamp, and do the thing at once, and that the bill would be sure to be taken up to the hour; because before it became due he would have the Aspen Court rents in his hand. He said, in a very serious way, '*Such bills are always taken up to the hour.*' But he would not go on with the business then; because he said, in a meaning way, that I could not see the Barnstaples that afternoon, City business hours being over; and that *if I succeeded in inducing my cousin to sign*, I could come to him at the same hour next day. I did succeed—ha! ha! and got the money. As to its being your client's money, that's all my eye, of course."

This was not a judicious address, all things considered. Mr. Molesworth listened to it with his usual imperturbability; Mr. Scolper with occasional vivid fits of indignation. Henry Wilmslow having finished, walked up and down the little room in order to relieve his highly-wrought feelings; and during the promenade the two lawyers exchanged glances of considerable meaning. Mr. Scolper then said,—

"Now, Wilmslow, if you'll sit down, and hear what I have to say, it will do you no particular harm. I think you may make up your mind, Wilmslow, to close your brilliant and useful career in one of the colonies."

"*He will go with me*," cried Henry, looking furiously at Molesworth. "And now I will wish you both a good morning. I must look to myself."

"Possibly we can save you that trouble," said Scolper, coughing loudly. The signal was answered by a cough from the adjoining room.

"You must see, Wilmslow," said Mr. Scolper, "that my duty to my client, whom you have so cruelly injured, will not permit me to neglect any steps pointed out by the laws of our country. That you may be able to induce a jury to believe the story

with which you have favoured us, is my earnest hope—and, I may add, Mr. Molesworth's, despite the abominable attempt you have made to include him in your offence. But until you have done so, it is necessary and right that security for your appearance should be given, and the individual who just coughed outside is an officer, who, with a companion, will escort you to Bow Street."

"What, trapped me like that?" exclaimed Henry, waxing very white. "I did not expect this."

"You ought to have expected it, Wilmslow," said Mr. Scolper. "Are you not aware that punishment always follows crime?"

"D—n your preaching," said Henry, who, driven to bay, became desperate.

"I have been silent for some time," said Molesworth, "but I will now say a word or two. I can have no feeling towards this wretched man except one of pity. I knew him in other days, when I had hopes of him, which he has long since cruelly disappointed. I was the means of introducing to him the best wife man ever had, and he has outraged and insulted her, and all but broken her heart. Yet, for old recollections, I would do what I can for him."

"That scoundrel, Molesworth, is frightened," said Henry to himself. "All this fine talk is humbug, and either meant to diddle Scolper, or somebody who has been listening. I'll clench the nail, however. Gentlemen," he said, "a great many hard words have been used about me, which I may or may not deserve. But I see which way the cat is going to jump."

"One more animal—I thought so," said Scolper.

"I recommend you to hold your row," said Henry, insolently. "I am not fool enough not to see that you are only a sort of puppet here, and that your strings are pulled by my friend to the left."

"I have no more to say," said Molesworth; "I will leave you. Take your own course. If it be any comfort to you, Mr. Wilmslow, to know that whatever happens to you, the interests of your wife and children shall be cared for by me, take that assurance. I wish you better fortune than you deserve. Farewell." He heaved a deep sigh, and left the room.

Henry's last hope vanished. Wilmslow sat for some moments in silence, and then said,—

"Well, you've got your own way now ; why don't you call in the fellows ?"

"In such a hurry to be locked up—eh ! Take my word, you'll have enough of it in the gaol before the convict-ship takes you out. You haven't a chance. You are booked, my friend. And it is pretty much your own fault, too."

"What's the use of preaching, I tell you. When a man's hard up for a pound—I mean, a man who has been brought up as a gentleman : a snob isn't tempted ; if he can't get wine he can drink beer—but a gentleman driven into a corner will do anything."

"Glad I'm only a gent, then. But I didn't mean as to the old story, but to-day. There stood Molesworth, full of kindness for your wife and children, and ready to do anything in reason for you ; and instead of humbling yourself before the man you have injured, and who could and would serve you, you talk about cats and alligators, and invent a whole chapter of lies that contradict themselves. You wouldn't let him help you. I bet at this moment he's considering how he can get you off. I know that's the wish nearest his heart now."

"Devilish little you have done to help him to it, then," said Henry. "I don't know why you should be my enemy. What does it signify to your client, if you have one, whether that bill was forged or not, if it is paid ?"

"But it is not paid. It is seized, and the word Forgery written across it."

"Molesworth takes the Aspen Court rents, and could pay it a dozen times over. But there is some malice against me," said Henry dejectedly. "I don't know, though I suspect who is at the bottom of it."

"Hold your tongue, do. It's the being so fond of talk that has ruined you to-day. If I were to do anything for you, I should be insulted the next minute."

"Oh, I'm an infernally bad fellow, of course," said Henry. "An unlucky man always is. If you were game to give me a chance, I might make it worth your while."

"How could you ?" said Scolper. "You have nothing except what Molesworth pays you, and, I take it, your order on him would not go for much. Besides, no, the warrant is in the officers' hands."

"And the officers are there. Done, and done brown," said Henry. "By George, I wish I had had a suspicion of this—I'd have put the sea between you and me hours and hours ago. I could hide myself on the Continent, in places where none of your fellows could find me. I have been at hide-and-seek in my time. But it is of no use to talk of that."

"No, none," said Scolper. "I must do my duty. But you shall not be taken out before my clerks and people. I will ask the officers to take you through here."

He pointed to a panelled door in the old-fashioned wall. Wilmslow had not noticed it.

"I am going to add the adjoining chambers to mine, as my business increases. Then clients can come in by one staircase, and go out by the other. You shall be taken out through the empty rooms. By the way—I don't know that I ought, but you'll want money. Here's a couple of fivers for you, and if you are in great need, write to me, I dare say Molesworth will let me have any little advances. I'm afraid I must call in the men. But I'll tell them to be civil to you, as you are a gentleman."

He went out to speak to the officers. Henry Wilmslow was not quite such a fool as to misunderstand him, and that night he slept at Boulogne. Yet he might have slept at Aspen Court in perfect safety. His story about the bill was true to the letter, and though that did not avail him, inasmuch as he could not prove it, Molesworth had never allowed the forged bill to be presented at all.

CHAPTER XLVI.

VISITS FROM THE EARL.



FFTER the interview at which Mr. Heywood proposed to Lord Rookbury to become the nominal assertor of Lilian's claim to the Aspen Court estate, that nobleman, true to his usual indirect and whimsical course of action, went off to Mr. Molesworth, and, speculating upon his own theory of the purchaseability of all mankind, and upon the non-necessity of any peculiar delicacy in dealing with a lawyer, set before Molesworth

more of the designs of Heywood than he had a strict right to do, considering the terms of their provisional compact. He told the attorney, frankly, that he had himself long desired that Aspen Court should form part of the Rookbury property in the county, and, intimating to Molesworth that he was perfectly aware of the real state of the ownership, and of the views of all parties interested, unhesitatingly offered him a very large sum of money to "throw everybody overboard," and facilitate the transfer of the estate to the lord of Rookton Woods ; and I am happy to be able to add, that Molesworth behaved better than his superior in rank had done upon a similar occasion. For, as may be remembered, when Heywood put to Lord Rookbury a proposition which the latter had a right to deem dishonourable, his lordship went through a sham of indignation, not being, of course, in the least offended ; whereas Mr. Molesworth, receiving a similar proposition, did not stoop to the hypocrisy of pretending to be shocked or insulted, but disposed of the proposal with as unruffled a brow and as pleasant a smile as if the Earl, in place of asking him to commit a rascally action, had merely been instigating him to spirit away a witness, mislay a valuable document, offer an unjust defence, or do any other little matter in the regular course of business. It is pleasant to see that inferiors in rank sometimes set examples of merit to those who are above them.

But it was not merely his contempt for hypocrisy that induced Molesworth to listen, without a show of impatience, to Lord Rookbury. He was very desirous of knowing how far a pledge, which had been given in that very room some months before, had been kept, under circumstances which rendered its breach very probable. It was then that Bernard Carlyon had informed the startled lawyer, that the machinery which Molesworth had devised for securing Aspen Court to himself, had been accidentally made known to the younger man. Carlyon had promised secrecy ; but the connexion between himself and Molesworth had been broken off, a fact which with many men is held to be an absolution from old pledges ; and besides this, Bernard had become the intimate friend of those to whom a knowledge of the real case would be invaluable. Lord Rookbury had assisted him ; what more likely than that Bernard's place was his reward for surrendering a secret. Carlyon had been much with the Aspen Court family ; what more natural than that he should have

secured one of its portionless heiresses, on the strength of being able, by the possession of the secret, to make advantageous terms for his bride. Or, between keen-witted lords, oily Jesuits, and fascinating women, he might have given up his information involuntarily; for, after all, he was but a young man. At least Molesworth determined to know; and this was another reason why he listened with so much toleration to the audacious and unflattering overtures of the Earl. When, in his turn, Molesworth became the questioner, with a view of ascertaining how much Lord Rookbury really knew upon the subject, he was a good deal baffled by the keenness of the Earl, who stood cross-questioning well, and who had moreover an unfair habit of falling back upon his nobility when hardly pressed. But the professional triumphed over the amateur, and the solicitor finally succeeded in discovering, that though Lord Rookbury had confidently asserted his knowledge of the position of affairs, he had asserted that which was untrue, having merely a general impression that the Wilmslows had in some way parted with their rights. This, however, the Earl would naturally, Molesworth felt, have learned from his protégé Henry, and it was with much satisfaction that the lawyer, having artfully and completely tested the Earl's information, came to the conclusion that Bernard had been true to his word.

As for Lord Rookbury, he felt that he had been baffled this time, and that he had shown his hand rather uselessly. But upon the whole, he did not very much care. The attempt had been made on the spur of the moment, and not as part of his general project, and he parted from Molesworth in a very polite manner, remarking to himself that the lawyer would, for the sake of his own character, keep the secret that such proposals had been made. And, moreover, the Earl felt by no means sure that, though his offer had been in the first instance rejected, it might, upon consideration, be accepted; and therefore he gave orders, when he left town for Rookton Woods that same night, that all letters should instantly be forwarded to him.

This order brought him—not the acceptance of his proposals by Molesworth—but a letter with a foreign postmark, and in the handwriting of a man whom the moment before he believed to be within a few miles of him, and for whom he had designed to send to Aspen Court in the course of the day. It was from

Henry Wilmslow. Assuredly an Emperor of Russia could not have received less graciously the news that one of his nobles had departed, without leave, from the Holy Empire, than did the lord of Rookton learn the flight of the lord of Aspen. And his anger was not diminished when he proceeded to read Wilmslow's narrative of the Clement's Inn scene, from which account—distorted as it was, and garnished by Henry with a view to making the Earl believe that his friend had borne himself in a noble and spirited manner, had cowed the two villanous conspirators, and had marched out with the honours of war—his lordship learned that Molesworth, for reasons of his own, had sent Wilmslow flying. Not one word of this had the lawyer hinted at, in the interview with the Earl the day before, and on the contrary had talked as if he supposed Wilmslow to be at Aspen. This effrontery of Molesworth's exasperated Lord Rookbury far more than the failure of his propositions; and with a fine burst of feudal feeling he declared, with oaths, that a lawyer who had dared to humbug a British nobleman ought to be struck off the rolls, and transported. However, he postponed his vengeance, ordered his horses, and crossed the country to Aspen Court.

Poor Jane received him with her usual meekness, and as a visitor whom it was useless to think of excluding. Bernard, upon his return to town, had called upon the Earl to report the result of the medical visit, but, missing Lord Rookbury, had written him a brief account of the scene in the garden, apprising him that Mrs. Wilmslow now knew what blow was impending. As usual, nothing could be kinder or more sympathising than the Earl's manner; and Jane, though her nature recoiled from his, could not refuse to see a good intention in the mission that had terminated with so sad a shock to herself. That instinct by which a woman unerringly detects a kindness, in act or meaning, and that honesty with which she recognises it, poor thing! in her sorrow, or from one whom she hates—it may be with cause—is a faculty which helps her to do justice, a good deal oftener than we manage to do it, with all our stately protests that we take all circumstances into consideration, and invariably estimate conduct upon its merits. When the first poignant agony of the revelation of Amy's condition had taken a calmer form, Bernard had explained to Kate the object of the physician's

visit, and the motives which had induced himself to join the scheme; and when Kate could, still more gently, repeat the explanation to her mother, Mrs. Wilmslow did not do one moment's injustice to those who had desired to befriend her, even though their plan had brought down the sorrow with such crushing suddenness upon her. Even, as we have seen, when roused into unwonted energy and determination, and when detailing her wrong to Molesworth, the only blame Jane would impute to them was that they had not trusted in her.

There was now but one business in Aspen Court. Mother, sisters, servants, all had one duty, and but one—the affectionate tending of the beloved one whose end was approaching. Amy's favourite room—that which was described as having been somewhat modernised, and whose windows, unlike those of the rest of the mansion, were of large plate-glass squares—had been fitted up for her, and upon this chamber the whole cares of the household were concentrated. Day and night, loving sentinels kept watch and ward, each anxious to claim and reluctant to yield her guard. When Lord Rookbury arrived, he was unhesitatingly informed by a servant that he could see Mrs. Wilmslow by coming up to Miss Amy's room, no other way. And having sent up for permission to do so, to Miss Amy's room he was conducted.

The apartment was very cheerful, and from the sofa on which Amy lay, she obtained without effort a full, rich, landscape view, in which foliage and green sward alternately led the eye down to the distant river—all, leaves, and turf, and bright water, gladdened by a glowing sunshine. There was little change in the appearance of the dying child. She was languid, but still roused herself with apparent ease as a thought occurred to her, or as any accident excited her attention, and the smile returned more frequently to her face than to any face around her. But there was upon her features that unmistakeable expression—that sign which none who have once heeded it ever misread—the constant look of *expectation*. Where this is seen on a face like that of little Amy, angels, too, are expecting a sister who will not long keep them waiting.

Needless to say that the Earl's affectionate interest in poor little Amy was manifested in the most winning manner, and that it was difficult for Mrs. Wilmslow to preserve all her repugnance

for him in the presence of so much tender and evidently sincere concern for her child. He did not advert to the physician's visit, but spoke of having gained his knowledge of Amy's condition from Carlyon, of whose rising fortune and distinguished talents he casually introduced a very cordial mention, to the gratification of his hearers. With too much tact, knowing what he knew, to breathe a word of actual hope for Amy, he contrived to allude to the future in a way which insensibly led the hearts of the others to ideas of being still united and together, when a change of season should bring the flowers and the fruits of which he spoke; and, unconsciously to themselves, his listeners felt a certain consolation in what he said. The shadow upon the house became somewhat less defined for them. Needless to say that the choicest produce of the Rookton Woods, hot-houses, and forcing-houses, and other resources, was to be daily sent over, on the chance of some part of it being acceptable; or that Amy was entreated, as a special favour to her old friend, to amuse herself by devising some dish, or preparation, or confection, which should tax to the utmost the talents of the Rookton artists. Perhaps they might succeed in pleasing her—he hoped so; but, at all events, let them try—it would *so* oblige him if, in council with her sisters, or of her own inspiration, Amy could think of anything that should give them a chance. And after exactly as long a stay as was fitting, the invalid's condition being remembered, the Earl took the kindest farewell of the girls, and begged for a few moments of conversation with Mrs. Wilmslow.

They went into the drawing-room, and Lord Rookbury, preserving the same tone of quiet cheerfulness, said a few words of apology for his share in the visit of the physician—fewer, certainly, than might have been expected; but he wished to lead Jane away to a subject which would have small power to interest her, if her recollections of the garden scene were to be vividly evoked. So, hastening over what he could hardly have entirely omitted, and acknowledging poor Jane's forgiveness almost as briefly as it was granted, he entered upon the subject which had brought him over.

“A letter which has been forwarded to me from town, my dear Mrs. Wilmslow, informs me that for the moment Aspen Court is without its master.”

"Mr. Wilmslow has left England," said Jane, with composure.

"And with an intention of remaining on the Continent?"

"I am unable to say," replied Mrs. Wilmslow. "He will most probably not write to me at present; but he has been in communication with Mr. Molesworth, our solicitor; and anything that can be learned of his plans will be known by Mr. Molesworth."

"That is a gentleman in whom, I believe, both you and Wilmslow place the utmost confidence," said Lord Rookbury.

"He has acted for us for many years," replied Jane, "and it is to his exertions, as you are aware, that we owe the recovery of this estate."

"And now, Mrs. Wilmslow, I am going to speak to you as a friend, who does not hesitate to take a liberty where his friend's interests are concerned. I am well aware that I am not so fortunate as to be honoured with your very highest regard—I will add, that in many respects I have not deserved it. My character was formed when people thought far less seriously and rightly upon many matters than they do now, and it is too late to alter it. I am not a good man. It is when I meet a good woman that I feel the full evil of my position. But it is useless to talk of these things. Be assured that, though anything but good, I can recognise and honour goodness. Now, believe as much or as little in my sincerity in saying this as you please, but at least give me credit for knowing what I am about. I am going to make a statement to you, which you will consider more improbable than anything you have lately heard."

"My life has been too stormy a one for me easily to be surprised, Lord Rookbury," said Jane; yet, as she spoke, her eyes as soft and her smile sad and gentle as ever, she looked one—if ever there were one—whom the storms ought to have passed very lightly. But those who have likened life to a sea, may have remembered that the blind tempest, whirling in its fury, often leaves unscathed the pirate's vessel and the usurer's venture, and strips sails and cordage from the gallant bark that holds true hearts, bent on some noble mission.

"Nay," said the Earl, "if I had not the utmost reliance on your fortitude and prudence, I should hesitate at the disclosure I wish to make. This is—in the plainest terms—that Mr

Molesworth, in whom your confidence is placed, is utterly unworthy of it."

"Such, I know," said Jane, calmly, "has at times been Mr. Wilmslow's opinion, and I suppose that it has been expressed to you."

"The easy, careless life of my friend Wilmslow, has scarcely qualified him for deciding on characters. No, assuredly, it is not from him that I derive my information."

"Information?" repeated Jane.

"Information—I should not have intruded my mere opinion upon you. I am in a position to state, that your friend Mr. Molesworth has, throughout all the transactions connected with Aspen Court, been playing a deceitful and a treacherous game. He has been labouring solely for his own interests, and I regret to inform you, that before long you will see those interests come into play, in a way most painful and disastrous to yourself and to your family. I would express more of the sorrow I feel at having to say this, that we have to do with more important things than feelings."

"I do not understand the charge against Mr. Molesworth," said Jane. "I have no doubt that he, as a lawyer, has taken care of himself, and I know that Mr. Wilmslow is largely his debtor."

"Is—or supposes himself to be. But it was less of Mr. Wilmslow than of yourself that I would speak. Mr. Molesworth has no doubt something to do with your husband's abrupt departure from England."

"Does Henry say so in his letter to him, Lord Rookbury?"

"No," said the Earl, (lying,) "but he mentions circumstances that leave me in no doubt on the subject. For reasons of his own, he has driven Wilmslow away from Aspen Court."

"For reasons of mine," thought poor Jane, but she did not answer.

"And before long," added Lord Rookbury, "he will drive away the remaining tenants."

"Myself and my children?" asked Jane.

"Yourself and your children."

Aware as Jane was of the circumstances under which Henry Wilmslow's flight had been made, she was naturally inclined to refuse credence to the assertion which the Earl appended. She

knew that Henry had been driven off at her own earnest instance, and therefore saw no foundation for the statement that she was to follow. But she could not explain this to Lord Rookbury, and therefore she quietly said,—

“If Mr. Molesworth has the power and the will to do this, it is indeed very sadly true that our position is disastrous.”

“You do not believe it,” said Lord Rookbury. “I hear disbelief in your voice; and it is most natural that you should not believe it.”

“I have no right to believe that Mr. Molesworth will act otherwise than fairly by us,” replied Jane. “But if you are not misinformed as to his intentions—and you must forgive me for believing, as well as hoping, that you are entirely mistaken—we appear to be powerless. If” she added, with a little stratagem, the deepest of which she was capable, poor thing; “if he could drive away the master of the house, what resistance can the wife and children make?”

“She is too cool, by half,” said the Earl to himself. “She ought not to take my news so quietly, whether she believed it or not. If she thinks it false, she ought to be excited and irritated. She knows something. That infernal Bernard *has* illuminated her; and she thinks to deceive *me*. “You take a very proper view of the case, Mrs. Wilmslow,” he said; “and I see that I am somewhat late with my information, for which you have evidently been prepared. Pray forgive my officiousness. Mr. Molesworth has probably given you formal notice, that he is about to eject you from Aspen Court. I was with him a few hours ago, but it did not occur to me, from what he said, that he had proceeded to that extremity—now, however, it is clear. All that I may take the liberty of adding, is the expression of my sincerest sympathy, especially that the blow should come at such time.”

He was a hard man, that Earl, but not so hard as to watch without compassion, the look of silent terror and agony which came over Jane's face as she arrived at the conviction that he was speaking truth. The poor, heart-broken mother, driven about for years, amid sorrow and privation, had at last found a home, and had gathered her children around her, trusting and praying to keep them in peace and honour. Then her youngest—her idol (we know why the idol)—is stricken down to die; and as she kneels beside the dying bed, and beseeches against

hope, that her darling may be spared, if only for another summer, she hears the harsh tidings, that even her resting-place is to be hers no longer. So accustomed to be persecuted, taught by so many years of painful lessons, that with the purse goes the right, the idea of resistance did not even enter her mind—at least not in time to save her from a burst of bitter tears.

“My poor, poor girls!” That was what she sobbed out—nothing more.

The Earl, we have said, liked her personally, and, besides, he hated to see women in sorrow. When he inflicted it, as he had had occasion to do many a time in his life of selfish passion, he always endeavoured to escape the “scene,” though, as he has confessed, not always successfully. But Mrs. Wilmslow he would not willingly have pained unless it were necessary to his plans. It *had* been necessary to wound her as he had done, and he had not shrunk from the process; but now he was eager to console her.

“This, dear Mrs. Wilmslow,” he said, “is the unkindest thing that ever escaped you. Should you speak in my presence as if those dear children ever could need pity? This should not be said to me. You know why it should not. Remember, I instantly acquiesced in a decision which deprived me of any right to be their guardian,—I thought never to allude to that subject again;—but it was upon the condition that we did not cease to be friends. And friends of Charles Rookton are not to be pitied—I am sure you understand me.” He took her hand, and she did not withdraw it.

“I don’t wonder at this news agitating you,” he said. “Were any one to bring me word that I was to be expelled from Rookton Woods, I think I should commit violence upon that person—I don’t know, but such is my impression now. But whether I did or not, I know that my next thought would be to defend myself against all comers, right or wrong. This is a thought which you do not seem to have entertained. But surely you must feel that the one thing you have to consider is, how to make the best resistance. For heaven’s sake, my dear Mrs. Wilmslow, do not look up so helplessly! Do you know,” said the Earl, speaking the actual truth, “that it is irritating to me to see any one appear helpless? I mean, of course, with ten thousand pardons, that it is so wrong to throw away one’s

chances." He had softened his voice again, but he really and truly had begun to be in a rage at the mute submission of Jane's look. Some men cannot bear to see such resignation.

"O, what can I *do*!" sighed Jane, piteously. "Could we—would you—beg Mr. Molesworth to give us a little time, now that Amy——"

It was of no use her trying to restrain herself, and she fairly went off into hysteric sobbing and spasm.

Lord Rookbury did not mind this half so much as her quieter sorrow, and having had, as we have said, some experience of this kind of grief forced upon him, he was enabled to deal with it judiciously; and, ere long, Jane was sufficiently composed to give rational attention.

"Now," said the Earl, "you must not be worried with business. But, in the absence of Wilmslow, some steps must be taken in your behalf, and for the protection of your interests. You have received no document of any kind from Molesworth?" He knew perfectly well that she had received none.

"Nothing," said Mrs. Wilmslow.

"But you know, through Bernard Carlyon," risked the Earl, "the nature of Molesworth's position with regard to Aspen Court?"

"Yes," said Jane, believing that she spoke the truth; "Mr. Carlyon explained it to me."

"Ah, just so!" said the Earl, privately exulting. "He explained to you that Molesworth's claim—how did he put it—would over-ride—or how? It would be well to know how you understood him."

It was always that Earl's way. He would not mind what was said to him. Half-a-score of prosperous statesmen had told him, that he would never do for a diplomatist while he would look people in the face with those eyes of his. But he never remembered this when he grew excited. Poor Jane lifted up her soft, gentle face, and was about to speak depreciatingly of her knowledge of business, when she met that eager, concentrated, falcon glance greedily waiting her explanation. The look perfectly dazzled her physical but cleared her mental vision. Not even the gentle, helpless Jane Wilmslow could misread the avidity with which her reply was desired.

"I—I am very, very ill," she said, rising and making her way

to the door. "Pray excuse me; I can speak reasonably on nothing to-day. I am sure you will forgive me."

What could the Earl do but open the door for her?

"If more troubles are in store for us," she said faintly, as she went out, "may God, who sends them, give us strength to bear them."

And she retreated somewhat hastily, leaving the Earl in a frame of mind which dictated a far less pious expression, and whose dictation was obeyed.

CHAPTER XLVII.

ABELARD.



HAT scowling apothecary of Lynfield Magna, Mr. Mardyke, in whose house Carlyon, it may be remembered, was originally introduced to the priest, did his duty by the latter, and Heywood was promptly informed by this medical spy, that Lord Rookbury had again appeared at Aspen Court. And Mardyke did better service still; for having been delegated by Heywood to attend upon Lilian and her uncle, at times when Heywood's mysterious engagements required that he should be left at liberty, Mardyke, by dint of perseverance, and some of the tact learned in his profession, contrived to elicit from Lilian the fact, that Bernard Carlyon understood the condition of the title to the estate. This was a great point gained, and Mardyke, with no loss of time, conveyed the intimation to his patron and employer.

"Can the public spare me ten minutes?" said Heywood, as he was shown into Bernard Carlyon's office.

"Twenty, if you like."

"Well, then, not to waste precious time, this is a strange state of things between poor Mr. Molesworth and the Wilmslows, about Aspen Court."

"To what do you particularly refer?" said Bernard, wondering what form the attack was now to take.

"O," said the priest, "you have behaved as became a *preux chevalier*, and your shield is spotless. But the matter is now beyond mysteries and reservations; and to be franker with you

than you care to be with me—and you are quite justified in your caution—Miss Trevelyan has felt it her duty to confide to her best friends what you have told her about the estate.”

“And all you know you have learned from Miss Trevelyan?” asked Bernard, quietly.

“I did not say that,” said Heywood. “But you know, of course, through Lord Rookbury, what negotiations are being carried on between Mr. Wilmslow and himself, and you do not know, probably, that I have had the honour of being admitted into those negotiations.”

“That is news to me, certainly,” said Carlyon, who did not believe the statement. “But I am quite sure that between three gentlemen of such character, everything will be done justly and honourably.”

“Thank you,” said the priest. “I recognise the neatness of your touch in the gentle observation that places me in the same category with the intellectual Wilmslow and the virtuous Rookbury. But pass for that, the rather that we want to bring you also into the conferences.”

“To represent whom?”

“Miss Trevelyan, if you choose. Now am I frank enough?”

“Quite,” said Bernard, with a marked expression. “But as I do not in the least understand how Miss Trevelyan’s interests can be advanced or injured by anything that either Wilmslow, Lord Rookbury, you, or I, can say or do, I should like a little more explanation.”

“You talk, Carlyon, as if you believed that the position of the title to the estates was still a secret from everybody.”

“I never heard that there was any secret in the matter,” said Bernard, rather unhesitatingly, all things considered. “There are very few secrets in these days.”

“Well then, Mr. Secretary Carlyon, let me tell you that there was one here, which has been kept very well, but which it has been no longer necessary to keep. Lord Rookbury went over to Aspen Court yesterday to see Mr. Wilmslow, and I have this morning a letter apprising me of what occurred.”

Carlyon’s hand shook a little with impatience, and his eye brightened. He felt that Heywood was deceiving him, and he evinced more eagerness to convict the priest than a diplomatist ought to have exhibited. Heywood, however, for want of a

single fact, failed to place Bernard's excitement to the right account.

"Lord Rookbury went over—ah! But I assure you, Mr. Heywood, that he could have learned nothing from Wilmslow."

"And I assure you, Mr. Carlyon," said Heywood, misinterpreting the reply, "that Wilmslow showed that he had not been kept in the dark to the extent some people imagined."

"You really gather this from your letter?" said Bernard, thoughtfully.

"Yes," said Heywood. "And I must add," he said, designing to complete the business, "that everybody is sensible of the way in which you have, under all circumstances, preserved the secret, except in a quarter where it was not to be supposed you would have secrets. You must not be angry with Lilian, for Wilmslow's explanation was given independently of hers."

"Yes," said Carlyon, as if displeased, "that may be so. Still," he added, in a more satisfied manner, "if Wilmslow had the honour to abstain from making any such explanation until so lately as yesterday,—"

"And that he did," said the priest, rather venturously.

"In that case," said Carlyon, "I do not so much care."

"I repeat to you that you need not care at all," said Heywood, who deemed that his bold play was winning.

"Well, I don't know that I do care at all," replied Bernard, cheerfully. "Because I also received a letter this morning; it was from Mr. Wilmslow, and announces his escape to France some days ago. So that you see, my dear Mr. Heywood, that if he kept his information to himself until Lord Rookbury's visit to Aspen Court yesterday—" He paused for a moment, and added, forgivingly, "But you are aware that it will not do to tell the truth in this world."

"You are telling it, I feel," said Heywood, with a strong effort to control his anger, not with Carlyon, but with himself.

"Here is the letter," said Bernard, handing it to him. "He begs that it may be confidential, but it is safe with you, now that you are in the negotiations on his affairs."

The priest received both the letter and the speech in silence, and glanced over the former.

"He wants money," said Heywood, after reading the letter.

"And, you are to propitiate—how the fellow spells—your friend Mr. Molesworth. Have you done so?"

"In other words, have I seen Mr. Molesworth to-day?" said Carlyon, meaningly. "No, I intended to call this afternoon."

"Well, you have shown me your letter. I will not be less liberal. Here is mine, from which you will see that when I said that Lord Rookbury went over to Aspen Court yesterday to see Mr. Wilmslow, and that I had a letter apprising me of what occurred, I stated what was true."

"*Loyalment—non, mais Loyolament,*" said Bernard, smiling, as he took the letter. "Mardyke; is that one of Lord Rookbury's *aliases*? O, I see. Yes, you are informed that the Earl went to Aspen Court, where he certainly did not find its master. Am I to read on—yes?—more mysteries. 'It is certain,' he read, 'that *Flos* is in full possession of all facts from *Leo*.' Who, may one ask, is *Leo*? and who is *Flos*?"

"I am revealing my friend's hieroglyphics, but it does not matter. Mardyke is one of the old-fashioned school of managers, and likes the formalities of mystic despatches. In *Leo* you will find a translation of the last syllables of your own name; in *Flos*, a more delicate allusion to *Lilian*."

"I see," said Carlyon, gravely. "We are honoured by the amount of interest taken in our affairs. Is it of any use to assure you," he added, returning the letter, (which contained a few more lines in which the writer took sufficient credit for having induced Miss Trevelyan to say so much, and expressed his hope to learn more,) "that Mr. Mardyke's discovery may be classed with the revelation from Mr. Wilmslow?"

"No, of no use," returned the priest. "I know Mardyke," he added.

"Very well," said Bernard. "Then pray accept, as a present, any information which he may extort, as from me, through Miss Trevelyan. For though you were good enough to tell me that she had felt it her duty to be confidential, I find no evidence of it in this *Flos* and *Leo* rubbish," he said, with some little contempt in his tone.

"Do not lose your temper, my son," said Heywood, who, though galled at the manner of the young man, strove to preserve the superiority he claimed for himself. "It may be a very *sad thing* that those who are charged with the guardianship of

Miss Trevelyan, should use every method to promote her interests, even though a Secretary of Salvages and Contingencies condescends to intermeddle with them ; but I fear that even his displeasure will hardly induce us to resign our duty."

"And would it be too much to ask," said Bernard, (who experienced a sort of lover's triumph at the humiliation of the man whose intimacy with Lilian never greatly delighted Carlyon,) "what object Miss Trevelyan's invaluable guardians proposed by the present interview, or how her interests are promoted by juggling and lying? I have spared the word before—you may remember, Mr. Heywood—when similar provocation was given me to use it?"

Priest though he was, the flush of rage set Heywood's ample forehead in a flame, but he was too true to his mission to let the fire descend to his tongue.

"Insult to me is very safe," said he, calmly. "Nay, let me be just," he added, for Bernard, to whom the same thought had occurred, was going to speak ; "I know, that had I been an Irish colonel of dragoons you would have said the same thing, and Miss Trevelyan's friends have a right to speak of your courage. I admit the provocation—you shall never again experience at my hands anything of the kind. I believe you feel that we are enemies."

"I feel," said Bernard, proudly, "that you stand in my way, and oppose, with all your might, the wish nearest my heart. I have, hitherto, been content with simply fighting my own battle. You cannot say that I have manifested any enmity towards yourself."

A strange feeling came upon Heywood. Carlyon's tone of self-reliance and of assured ultimate triumph struck a certain chill upon the proud man's heart ; and in struggling to shake off that sensation, Heywood roused himself into another phase of that mood of antagonism which was the key to his character.

"Fighting your own battle!" said Heywood. "You still cling to the melodramas of your youth. Why not add that you still wave your own glittering standard, and shout your own undaunted war-cry? I have more than once had to remind you of your antecedents, Mr. Secretary. You came to Aspen Court as a sort of man-in-possession. While there you scraped an acquaintance with a whimsical Earl, who took a liking to you,

and got you into a situation. Your next master was persecuted by a woman, to whom you rendered such assistance, that in order to get rid of you, he made you a clerk to the public, and here you are. And this you call fighting your own battles !' And he laughed an angry laugh.

The anger in the laugh comforted Bernard, who had perhaps winced a little under the coarse mode in which his rise had been traced.

"I think we had better end this interview," said he. "You asked for ten minutes, and I gave you twenty—a good many more have been wasted."

The priest laughed again, as if reverting to his taunts. Carlyon could not restrain himself.

"I will not, twice, give your statements the name they deserve," he said, "or, indeed, say anything to wound you, for, if I do not mistake in a guess which I have made, you are to be pitied—deeply pitied."

The magnificent eyes of Cyprian Heywood grew perfectly lurid, and his lips whitened, as he received this answer. But he only laid his hand heavily on the table and leaned towards Carlyon, as if to receive, full front, the next volley.

"You are the victim to a hopeless passion, which would entitle you to respectful sympathy, did you not, in sheer malice, seek to destroy the happiness of those who are more fortunate than yourself. But this being your course, one has but to be thankful that you are harmless alike as a rival and as an enemy."

Bernard's courage might have been of no common order, and yet have quailed before the look of intense wrath and hate which confronted him. He met the look steadily, however, and then turned to open a letter of business, not without an indefinite idea that he might, in another moment, be engaged in a physical grapple with the stalwart priest. But the latter did not rush upon him. He rose, and said,—

"I promised you that you should henceforth hear nothing but truth from me. What I told you about yourself gave you much displeasure. Yet I must tell you more. Lilian Trevelyan shall never be your wife."

"She shall," returned Carlyon, in his turn, excited beyond self-control; "she shall, as assuredly, miserable priest, as that a woman's love is no prize for such as you. Have you another

trick, another wretched device for hindering what is inevitable? If so, try it once more, and be once more baffled."

"Carlyon, I hate you," said the priest, preparing to retire, "and my hatred is fatal."

"Who talks in melodrama now?" said Bernard. "Your hatred is as harmless as—your love."

"You have seen neither yet," said Heywood, in a low, menacing tone. "But as you have chosen to read out the devil's book, beware of the fiend you raise."

"*Exit* Zamiel, in a flash of fire," said Bernard. The priest caught the words, but replied only with a menacing gesture, as he left the room.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

LILIAN'S FIRST LOVER.



HE riddle had been read somewhat roughly for Heywood, though certainly he had invited the plainest speaking on the part of Carlyon. And it had been read rightly. Heywood's admiration of the beautiful Lilian Trevelyan had gradually, but rapidly, developed into a passion, which, while he felt it to be aimless and hopeless, he had not the power, perhaps not the will, to extinguish. Originally becoming acquainted with him under circumstances which at once established the intimacy of ward and guardian, Lilian had unconsciously admitted Heywood to an earlier knowledge of the beauty of her frank and gentle nature than even a favoured lover might have gained. The spell was irresistible. The sensitive and fastidious priest saw, or believed that he saw, in the graceful, open-hearted girl the being who, had they met when he was free, would have given a purpose to his life, and once more he found himself at enmity with the world, with systems, and with destiny. It may be that he deceived himself as to the effect which an earlier knowledge of such a person as Lilian Trevelyan would have worked: the subject is one upon which many men, whose conjugal fate has been settled for them, are held—especially by their wives—to delude themselves. But of the firm grasp which Heywood's regard for Lilian took, and maintained upon his

heart, there could be no doubt. Of the nature of his affection for her he could hardly have given any account. There were times, indeed, especially when he had just mingled in the world, had seen success the reward of boldness, and life's prizes fall to those who had courage to claim them, that he would resolve upon some half-romantic scheme for the future. What wild visions he might at these times entertain of renouncing his vows, and seeking, with Lilian, his fortune in some distant land, it matters little. With thought and solitude came back the old spirit, and he found himself again lingering near the beautiful girl—felt himself as ever subject to the witchery of her loveliness, of her voice, of her gentleness; but all plans and purposes faded away in her presence, and he was content to dream away his hours in half-reserved, half-repining adoration.

These relations endured long; and while Lilian passed from fragile girlhood into the fuller beauty of a woman, the priest watched her progress with a restless and self-tormenting interest. As the charms of her form and of her mind developed, Heywood became less and less happy in their contemplation. It needed no presentiment to warn him, that every day which added to her attractions brought nearer the time when unfettered admirers would join him in his idolatry. He had owned to a secret, selfish pleasure, in the thought that the unsuccessful issue of the struggle for Aspen Court might diminish the number of such candidates for the hand of the unportioned heiress; and then this scanty consolation was wrested from him by the recollection, that while a few only might aspire to the heiress of Aspen, a beautiful girl, undowered, finds many suitors who approach her on even terms. The exclusiveness of the higher class of Catholic families, in England, limited the circle in which the Trevelyan moved; but before the adverse decision of the law, there had not been wanting overtures for alliance—overtures made, not in vulgar match-making style, but after the custom of that dignified class, and with the graceful and measured approach which might befit courtly negotiation. This, indeed, favoured Heywood; for, as the director to the little family, his power was absolute; and though he persuaded himself that in all his proceedings he was but consulting the interest of his ward, he contrived, with private satisfaction to *himself*, to cause the rejection of more than one proposal which

might well have been entertained. Lilian's heart having been unscathed, she not only bore her friend no ill-will for thus standing between herself and an alliance, but even felt thankful to him for relieving her from the necessity of its consideration ; and never were the relations between Heywood and Lilian more cordial than after his apprising her that any such proposition was withdrawn. The cheerful archness of her manner, upon such occasions, and the merry glances with which she intimated her approbation of what he had done, produced a mingled sensation of self-reproach and of something approaching to hope, in the bosom of Heywood. But this state of things could not last.

The fortunes of the family having altered, Heywood had a different game to play. During the residence of Lilian and her uncle in Mr. Mardyke's house at Lynfield, several acquaintances were formed, and a marriage for Lilian could have been easily, and not disadvantageously, arranged. But Cyprian Heywood, with his sensitiveness perhaps a little aroused to irritation by the change of circumstances, had so little hesitation in exerting his powers of sarcasm and satire upon all new comers whom he suspected of harbouring matrimonial views, that they speedily abandoned a field where the fight was all up hill. Marvellously little chance had the amiable efforts of a common-place young gentleman to render himself agreeable to Lilian Trevelyan, while the relentless priest sat in the same room. The pretender's mental resources were overhauled with the least possible ceremony, his gentle witticisms were martyred, and his gentler compliments victimised, and, in short, the situation was made so especially disagreeable to him, that he had rarely the courage to essay it again. Heywood was almost rude—had he not been a clergyman, his conduct would have been quite rude ; but he drove away the suitors, and cared nothing for conventionalities. Bernard Carlyon never knew the debt he owed to the priest.

The poor white uncle, Eustace, was, as we have seen, in no condition to understand the conduct of Heywood. The stricken, shattered man, had little thought but for the penances and prayers in which his diseased mind found occupation, if not repose. Even when in the possession of his limited faculties, he would, however, have seen little more than he saw while thus

prostrated and feeble, for his intellect, from his youth upwards, had served him but grudgingly. Heywood's ascendancy over him was now absolute, and he would have trembled at the thought of questioning the wisdom of his friend. That Lilian should not be aware that the priest regarded her with warm affection, was, of course, impossible, and equally so, that a nature like hers should not repay such affection with child-like trust and womanlike gratitude. But no key had as yet been furnished to her wherewith she could unlock any deeper mystery.

Then, as we have seen, came the hour and the man,—the rescue from the robbers, and the love of Bernard Carlyon.

Cyprian Heywood never deceived himself as to the position of affairs. He knew, even earlier than Lilian herself, that she had given away his heart. He speedily appreciated Bernard Carlyon, and though unable to restrain his own antagonistic temper, or to curb his violence of satire and sarcasm, he felt at once that these weapons were idle as against the new enemy. Something more than words was wanted in the *lutte* with Bernard. And the priest had tried more. Seeking artfully to lower Carlyon in his own esteem, and to discourage him from the attempt to win Lilian, Heywood, on the other hand, held out hopes of the prize, to be obtained by means which would compromise and ruin his rival. Baffled—less by Bernard's intellect, than by the instinct supplied to him by an earnest and honourable love—he set himself upon Carlyon's traces, and was more fortunate. The repute of few men, whose private lives are watched by a vigilant and unscrupulous enemy, and whose doings are explained by the glossary of his malice, will not tarnish under such exposure. Bernard was ambitious and proud of his success, and his pursuits frequently placed him in paths, where either a very high principle, or a very cold nature, can alone enable a man to walk quite uprightly. He was also guilty of the one offence, which (like that of intoxication, in the celebrated Eastern story) leads to so many more—he was *young*. Heywood's vigilance was not entirely unrewarded.

But time passed, and pressed. Bernard Carlyon, despite all obstacles, was making his way. He had prospered in official life, and had already attained an enviable position. And having made friends, he had also achieved the more difficult task of

keeping them, notwithstanding that he had received service at their hands. His situation entitled him, without indiscretion, to ask the hand of Lilian, and the priest was well convinced that it would not be asked in vain. One desperate effort, made by Heywood in a moment of unusual determination, has been recorded. It was when stung by a complication of annoyances, angry with Carlyon for his worldly success, envious even that he should have gained the stage laurels, and especially incensed at the pleasure Lilian could not conceal at reading (as, despite Heywood's precautions, she incessantly did) of the onward and upward progress of her lover; the priest, with no great tact, for he was fearfully in earnest, sought, by revealing to Lilian Trevelyan certain passages in Bernard's life, to crush her faith in him, and to wound her womanly pride. How, but for his over zeal, he might have injured Bernard's chances, we need not consider. By ingeniously coupling what had come under Lilian's notice at the theatre and elsewhere, with statements of his own as to Bernard's worthlessness, he did succeed in alarming and grieving the loving girl. But not for the first time in the history of woman's heart, innocence, unknowingly, preserved love from harm. The purity of Lilian's mind, utterly untaught in worldliness, refused to accept or to comprehend the worst phase in which Heywood sought to picture the conduct of Bernard. The malice of the priest would have done much, but his love for Lilian partook so much of veneration, that not even his hate for Carlyon could lead him to dare an outrage to her modest nature; and it was with a species of despair that he saw his tactics failing, and his charges, as understood by Lilian, melting away into nothing more than what a loving woman must feel, and a proud woman may pardon. Here, again, Bernard was better helped than he deserved to be, and so we all are where women are concerned.

Then Heywood, suddenly abandoning his original scheme of breaking the link between Lilian and Carlyon by establishing the unworthiness of the latter, took a higher ground, and made a strong appeal to Lilian's affection for himself and confidence in his wisdom. In tones of gravity and intensity which he was little accustomed to use, he implored her to refuse her hand to Carlyon. He urged the barriers of their different religions; and in answer to the tearful pleading of the poor girl, that Bernard had

promised to conform to her faith, the priest drew a sad and not an untruthful picture of the kind of religion to be expected from one who apostatized at the bidding of passion. Lastly, he reminded her of a certain curse, to which once before, it may be remembered, he alluded; he had extorted it, one night, in a moment of insane excitement, from the trembling Eustace Trevelyan, and it was launched against any interdicted marriage, and he solemnly, almost menacingly, demanded whether, for the sake of an unworthy worldly liking, she would expose herself to the anger of the church and of her God.

Was it strange, that, educated as Lilian had been in the belief that there was but one religion, that of her fathers—agitated by thoughts which, though far short of what Heywood had designed, wounded and hurt her—and appalled by the imposing manner of Heywood, to whom his own excitement lent dignity, and whose tones spoke of the most awful of human terrors—the gentle Lilian Trevelyan should have turned from him in an agony of tears, and, dropping wildly before a consecrated image that was at hand, have implored that she might be permitted to bury her sorrow in a convent?

Heywood had gained much, and ere long, Lilian was brought up to London under the care of Mr. Mardyke, to remain at Lily Nook until the necessary arrangements could be made for her reception into a religious establishment of the highest kind, whose titled superior was not unreasonably rejoiced at the prospect of adding so choice a flower to the garden of Heaven. It was on her way to London that the carriages in which Lilian and Bernard were travelling, passed, and the future nun met her lover's glance without a smile. He, could he have desired revenge, would have had it in beholding the agitation which astonished Mardyke, thenceforth, and until their journey ended.

But there is a homely saying, that a game is not won until it is lost. It was still Carlyon's turn to play, and the scene at Lily Nook ensued. The priestly cobwebs, so ingeniously spun, were all brushed away by the lover's hand, and into two little words—*Trust me*—was condensed the whole history of Heywood's overthrow.

From that time Lilian's character assumed a new aspect. *She became silent, almost reserved, though always gentle, but*

she manifested a firmness previously unknown to her. She signified to Mr. Heywood, and to the superior of the convent of our Lady of Heartsease, that she had reconsidered her wish to enter that establishment, and would defer doing so for a year. No expostulations, entreaties, or threats (for Heywood's temper more than once broke bounds, and even the scowling Mardyke presumed to offer counsel in no becoming tone,) could sway her from her purpose. Cyprian was in despair. In a moment of anger, for which he was almost immediately afterwards stricken with remorse, he signified his desire that Eustace and his niece should not remain at Lily Nook; and though Heywood contrived to steel himself against the mild look with which Miss Trevelyan immediately assented to wishes he had a right to express, he retracted and apologised in a letter of penitence, which brought a kind reply, but Lilian and her uncle departed. They returned to Lynfield.

You have perhaps given Carlyon credit for discovering Heywood's secret? It was Lilian, who opened the eyes of her lover. Something—it was a trifle, no doubt—had betrayed the truth to her, and in an instant the history of past years shone out with a strange, unwelcome lustre. The key to the mystery was in her hand, and she passed it to Bernard Carlyon.

And thus the interview at the Government office came to conclude as we have seen, and thus the riddle to be read.

CHAPTER XLIX.

"THE OLD MOLE."



DO not think that we can discuss my client's affairs with any great advantage, Bernard," said Mr. Molesworth, in the course of conversation, a few hours after the interview between the former and Heywood. "While you used to come into this room as my confidential clerk, it was all very well; but now you are a great man, in your way, and a government official, and as our relations are altered, so must our communications be. No offence to you, of course."

"Nothing can be more reasonable," said Bernard, "and I should be acting unwarrantably in asking a continuance of any

confidence you may have reposed in me—voluntarily.” He paused for a moment or two, that Molesworth might take in the meaning of the word, and then proceeded. “But, if I ask your advice, I do not suppose that you will refuse it to me.”

“It strikes me that you are quite capable of judging for yourself, Bernard, upon any matter on which it would suit you to consult me,” returned his former instructor. “And, in truth, you do not come here to-day for any advice regarding yourself, but for the materials of a consolatory letter to your friend Mrs. Wilmslow.”

“I said at once, that from information I had received—”

“There, don’t talk like a policeman, Bernard. You have been told that something is going on which may disturb the Wilmslows in their tenancy of Aspen Court. You remember a little talk which you and I had in this room a good while ago, and you think that the knowledge you had just then gained entitles you to ask anything more that I can tell you. Well, we may think differently about that. But I will give you a piece of advice, if you like to have it.”

“Willingly,” said Carlyon, who had determined to behave in an exemplary manner upon this occasion.

“Well, then, marry one of the Miss Wilmslows. You need not look surprised. I admit that it is no business of a solicitor to be a match-maker for his clients, but there are exceptions to all rules, and I feel myself justified in making one in the present case. You are an eligible young man enough—a fact which of course you know better than I can tell you,—and you would be acceptable to Mrs. Wilmslow, as you also know.”

“Without going into that question,” said Carlyon, laughing, “I may be allowed to extract from your suggestion the consolation you spoke of.”

“Deuce you may! Why?”

“Because I am certain, Mr. Molesworth, that your friendliness for me would prevent your proposing to me a disadvantageous marriage. The inheritance of the young ladies is safe.”

“Very well; very well, indeed, Bernard. Then a beautiful and amiable young lady, if she happen to have no landed property, is a bad match for Mr. Bernard Carlyon.”

“No,” said Bernard, whose heart instantly hinted the name of

Lilian, "but I have a right to expect, at your hands, as good treatment as you showed to Mr. Henry Wilmslow."

Here the lawyer interjected a curse upon Mr. Henry Wilmslow, which was not exactly an answer, but Carlyon accepted it, like a sensible man, and made it an excuse for producing Henry's letter, and asking whether he had better reply.

"Yes," said Molesworth, taking some money out of that fatal drawer of which Wilmslow made mention in the scene at Clement's Inn. "Here are twenty pounds. Send it as from yourself; it will be a delicate attention to your proposed father-in-law. I am quite serious in the advice I give you about taking one of those girls, Bernard. I should have counselled you to marry the eldest daughter, for an eldest daughter, unlike an eldest son, is generally the best member of a family; but something has reached me about a preference for the next—and you colour! Well, Kate is rather young, but she is more womanly than most girls at her age, and another year, with the dignity of an engagement constantly upon the lady's mind, will make her very presentable."

"We need not discuss the matter longer," said Carlyon, with whom a certain consciousness, to which allusion has more than once been made, prevented his hearing Kate Wilmslow's name without a self-reproach,—a gentle one, you may be sure, for men sit leniently in judgment upon themselves for having been so unfortunate as to encourage the hopes of women. "I know that you have really my welfare in view, and therefore it is right to say that any matrimonial intentions I may have point in another direction."

"Where?" exclaimed Molesworth, with a face suddenly assuming a stern look, and with a voice of anger.

It was certainly not the tone in which one gentleman would ask information of another, with the reasonable hope of receiving a courteous answer. Yet there was something in the manner—was it the evident earnestness—which made Bernard disregard the rudeness, and reply, in extreme surprise,—

"You are unacquainted with the person—"

"Then it is time I should cease to be so," continued Molesworth. "Who is it, I ask you?" he added, almost menacingly.

"You must pardon my not—"

"I pardon nothing!" thundered Molesworth. "The name, I ask you, once more."

"You have reminded me of our changed relations, Mr. Molesworth," said Carlyon, now recovering himself, and rising. "It is for me, in turn, to remind you that I am not to be questioned against my will."

Molesworth started to his feet, and laid a large, strong hand upon the shoulder of Bernard, who seemed about to retire. Detaining Carlyon thus, he gazed earnestly, and with a knitted brow, upon the face of the younger man, and though his grasp was firm, his body swayed with agitation. So singular a manifestation on the part of the usually impassive lawyer, not only astonished but alarmed Carlyon, who had a theory of his own about the tendency of reserved men to madness. He bore the grip of Molesworth with perfect patience, and with a sudden and sorrowful conviction that the brain of his instructor had been overtasked.

"Then you will not tell me who it is that you mean to marry, Bernard?" said Molesworth, in an accent so much more gentle, not only than his last angry tones, but than his ordinary hard voice, that Carlyon was touched.

"There is no reason for my keeping the secret," he replied, mildly, "but you surprise me by the way in which you ask a question which can have so little interest for you."

"That is true," said Molesworth, removing his hand, but not hastily, from Carlyon's shoulder, "and I have to beg your pardon for my abruptness."

Undoubtedly it was right that he should beg pardon, and yet there was something in the way he said this, which made Carlyon feel that *he* should like to beg pardon for having caused the excitement he had witnessed. Molesworth looked earnestly at him for a few moments, and then said, resuming his seat,—

"You have no intention of immediate marriage?"

"Certainly not," said Bernard.

"As regards Aspen Court," said Molesworth, suddenly abandoning the previous subject, "you know how the title lies. The folks who lost the game think that they have another chance. Are you a gambler?" he demanded, abruptly.

"No. I hate anything in which chance can beat skill."

"I am glad to hear it—very glad. But you know what false

cards are. When the right time comes, and the fraudulent card is laid down, the cheat's hand and the cards under it are sometimes nailed to the table. That is all I can say to you about the people whom you and I beat. Mrs. Wilmslow has nothing to fear from them."

"To tell you the truth, I did not suppose she had anything to apprehend from open enemies. I have only glimpses and guesses as to what is going on, but, to speak quite frankly—"

"Pray do so to me, Bernard, upon all occasions."

"It is known that Lord Rookbury desires to have the estate."

"The day he takes possession, I will give you Rookton Woods."

"I am almost ashamed to add that he is known to be in communication with yourself."

"I am not ashamed of it. He is a very bad old fellow, but he is going to make his way into my good graces by giving me some trumpery manorial business, and his name will look as well on a tin box as many names which you read on that row. What *he* may intend to do with me is his own business. I only renew to you my pledge as to Rookton Woods."

"You know, of course, the sorrow which has come upon Mrs. Wilmslow, about poor Amy?"

"Better, perhaps, than yourself." And Molesworth, finding that Carlyon was unacquainted with the circumstances of Mrs. Wilmslow's visit, and the charge of forgery, briefly enlightened Bernard as to the flight of Henry; upon the real history of which Hegira, it is needless to say, the Ambassador had not been very precise, in writing to Carlyon. On the departure of the latter, Molesworth shook him warmly by the hand, with a cordial pressure, which we mention only because it was so utterly unlike the strong manifestation of intense regard which he sometimes deemed it desirable to put forth in taking leave of valuable clients. The last thing he said was,—

"Now go and write your consolatory letter to Mrs. Wilmslow."

Bernard had meditated writing to her, and on his way back to the Salvages and Contingencies he occupied himself with the concocting a few sentences, by which he might gracefully introduce the subject. But, as usually happens, his pains were thrown away, for his writing became not only a thing not requiring excuse, but a thing absolutely demanded. He found on

his desk, among the afternoon letters, one from Mrs. Wilmslow, in which the visit of Lord Rookbury, and his allegations about Molesworth, were described by poor Jane, and Carlyon was entreated to afford her any information in his power.

"She had nothing to fear from the enemy, and nothing from Lord Rookbury," said Bernard, recalling the interview from which he had just come. "But has she anything to fear from Molesworth himself?" How pertinaciously, he thought, had the Earl been working at Wilmslow, to extract such information as he had procured. And how much did that come to, he next considered. Was the whole attempt upon Mrs. Wilmslow a device to draw out more from her? And—were letters safe? Jane's had been stopped before—and what could not a rich, determined man do with a cross-country post-bag? All this passed very rapidly through Carlyon's mind, and he came to a decision as to the transmission of his answer. But what should he say? Could he give poor sorrowing Jane such assurances as he desired? He would not for the world give her false comfort, and yet all that he could truthfully say was, that he believed in the honest intentions of a lawyer who had her in his power.

Partly from training, partly from nature, Bernard was, we know, distrustful of his fellow-men—too distrustful, taking the average of mankind, if not so, taking the respective circles which surround an attorney's office or a public department. Profession and sentiment, he had accustomed himself to believe the varnish of humbug, and he had equally set himself against the sham candour which affects to discard profession and sentiment. It was difficult to say in what man Bernard trusted at first sight—almost as difficult as to find him at first sight distrusting a woman. Specially we are aware that he had his own reasons for knowing that Molesworth could, upon occasion, prove himself as hollow in word as in deed. Yet, after the interview of that day, Carlyon sat down to write to Jane Wilmslow, and without a guarded phrase or a qualified assurance, expressed to her an instinctive and unhesitating belief that Molesworth was her friend, and that those who accused him of meditating treachery were themselves plotters. The letter was a cordial and generous one, of a kind which Bernard, deeming few folks worthy to receive such at his hand, seldom wrote, giving his habitual correspondents far more readable and amusing matter.

The letter came straight from his heart. Yet what had Molesworth done to sanction such a letter? Simply behaved very rudely and strangely to Carlyon.

But could Carlyon have foreseen what would be the result of writing such a letter, he would have considered a little longer about it. For, having completed it, he—to the further detriment of the public service—indited another letter, designed to evade any evil intentions which he thought it possible his friend Lord Rookbury, or his friend Heywood, or some of their friends respectively, might have upon the Aspen Court post-bag.

He enclosed the letter to Lilian Trevelyan, at Lynfield, intimating to that young lady that she was to read it, as it would keep her completely informed of everything connected with himself, (sundry affectionate assurances not material to the story here intervening,) and that she was then to despatch it privately and safely to Aspen Court, so privately as to elude the vigilance of Mr. Mardyke, and so safely that the messenger was to entrust it to no hands but those of Mrs. Wilmslow. And Lilian duly received the letter.

CHAPTER L.

LITTLE ANGELA'S HISTORY.



PAUL CHEQUERBENT gradually recovered. His age and constitution promised a more rapid convalescence from a mere flesh wound; but he had lived that kind of life, wasteful of vital energy, and yet not brightened by the excitement of pleasure, which tells most unfavourably upon the frame, and renders prostration a rapid work. Excess without enjoyment is not only the most sordid and mocking of follies, but the most destructive to mind and body. And this, for some time previously to the wild beast encounter, had characterised Paul's sullen and solitary existence. Needy, disappointed, discouraged, he had felt that everything was against him; and lacking the moral courage to bear up against such odds, he had resigned himself, ungraciously enough, to that most unwholesome condition of things, when our being seems at once turbid and stagnant. It was well for Paul that

the demoralizing process was brought roughly to a stand-still by the teeth of Mr. Penkridge's hyæna.

But we are very desirous that our Paul should not be thought worse than he was, and we recur with some pleasure to his good and gentlemanly behaviour when visited in the hospital by the Lady Anna. Paul's old honourable and manly instincts awakened, and instead of uttering complaints and reproaches, or of seeking to induce his young and frank-hearted friend to compromise her prospects by any renewal of their intimacy, he received her visit with gratitude, but abstained both from any demonstration of other feeling, and from any entreaty that she would repeat a charity which might displease her father. And therefore we are glad to write that he got better of his wound, and that the medical authorities of St. Vitus's ultimately sanctioned his removal—effected by our handsome friend Mrs. Sellinger—to a cheerful little lodging at Islington, which Angela was decking and decorating, to the utmost of her ability, up to the moment the cab containing Paul and the Junonian dancing-mistress entered the street, though she effected her escape through the garden, and up the back lane, (went off R. U. E., as she herself laughingly said,) before the arrival of the invalid. Mrs. Sellinger charged herself with taking care of him, and fulfilled her charge with great fidelity.

Leaving Paul to recruit his strength, and vow to lead a worthier life, and, in the meantime, to read up the "Scottish Chiefs," "Fatherless Fanny," and other novelties procured for him at the little circulating library at the corner of the street, we will follow Angela, (let us call her so while we may,) who had returned to her own apartments, and waited to hear Mrs. Sellinger's account of how Paul was going on, and whether he was comfortable, and whether she could get him anything, and so forth. Angela would not have been content to obtain this information at second-hand, but for her friend's decided behaviour. Mrs. Sellinger expressly stipulated that Angela should behave herself with discretion, at all events until she knew her exact position in the world. Entertaining private opinions of her own touching the Lord Rookbury, the dancing-mistress (who had picked up a good many things from the hundreds of Cymons whom she had civilized in her time) disbelieved, generally, in the honesty of the Earl's intentions, or the truth of his statement of Angela's

legitimacy. But, as a woman of the world, she was determined that her pretty little friend, the actress, should do nothing to justify her noble father in convincing himself that she was degenerate, and a person to be dismissed with an annuity. So she made Angela take befitting apartments in the house of a couple of old maids, of the sternest gentility, and insisted upon her living in orderly solitude, burning all her play-books, and ringing the bell when the fire wanted coals, instead of throwing them on for herself. The merry, active little girl found all this very hard work, but she felt Mrs. Sellinger was reasonable, and she agreed to bide her time like a lady, with a strong mental reservation in the event of Paul Chequerbent requiring her aid.

Lord Rookbury sent her money several times, in letters without a direction, but which his confidential valet placed in her hands, in the most respectful manner, and with the politest inquiry on the part of his lord as to her health, and whether she had any wish which he could gratify. But the Earl signified no wish of his own, for her guidance, nor had he as yet intimated any further intention of introducing her into society. The continuance of this probationary state occasionally made Angela incline to murmur, but Mrs. Sellinger would see nothing in it but the due precaution of a fastidious parent, putting his daughter through a sort of quarantine, between the tainted atmosphere of the theatre, where people paint themselves, and pretend to be what they are not, and the pure and virtuous air of aristocratic society, where all is candour and goodness. A sudden change—a rapid ascent from the valley into the difficult air of the iced mountain-top—might have been too much for the little girl. So, at least, half in earnest, half in jest, talked Mrs. Sellinger to her pretty friend, counselling patience.

Now I had rather intended to have thrown only as much light upon Angela's pedigree as would have sufficed to light the gentlemen of Doctors' Commons, who, having to draw up her marriage-licence, must be told what her name is. But circumstances compel me to say more than I originally designed to do, and although a little actress is, of course, not a person of sufficient consequence to mingle in the business wherewith divers dignified and exalted people, such as earls, ambassadors, secretaries, clergymen, and the like, propose to terminate our history, she will not be able to slip from the scene without what she

would herself call something to take her off. And therefore at this point I am obliged to explain that the Earl of Rookbury, in declaring that she was his daughter, told the truth, and that in declaring her to be his daughter by marriage, he also told the truth, and yet his whole statement, being intended to deceive, was a falsehood.

Very soon after the death of the Countess of Rookbury—the not very eligible plebeian widow whom the whimsical Earl chose to wed, in preference to a hundred magnificent virgins of title, any one of whom the Lord of Rookton might have beckoned to the bridal, with a certainty of the fair creature's grateful obedience—the manager of the King's Theatre, steadily treading the appointed way from that establishment to the Bankruptcy Court, imported some Spanish dancers, who, like the unknown heroes of old, “lacked a poet, and”—and did not draw. Criticism had not then discovered one of its functions, and the public was not taught to understand the æsthetics of pantomime. So the speculation failed, and the artists, of course, were cheated, and after dropping down to some bad engagements at English theatres, where the audience scorned to be pleased with what had not delighted their betters, the poor dancers had to make their way home again. *One* might have remained, Maria Dolores de Padillas, she having been offered terms by a noble *habitué*, who could appreciate her fine flexible form, her irregular beauty, and her intelligent action ; but Maria was virtuous, and the proposed arrangement, though offered through a younger nobleman, who was until the other day in our diplomatic service, was rejected. Poor Maria little knew the man to whom she had given such just cause of anger. Indeed she did not know him at all, save by name. She departed from England with the rest of her comrades, and they made their way through France towards the Pyrenees, eking out their limited means by performances at some of the towns on their road. At one of these, where the *troupe* was reduced to great distress, the extreme kindness of a Polish colonel, in the French service, who had accidentally arrived at the same time, threw the poor Spaniards into ecstasies of gratitude. Colonel Paskovitch relieved their immediate wants, placed in the manager's hand a sum sufficient to carry them to the frontier, and when they set out, he proposed to accompany them on a part of their journey. He made him-

self exceedingly acceptable—he spoke French fluently, but with an accent for which his Polish birth accounted, and when he was not rendering himself agreeable to his other fellow-travellers, he was making honourable love to Maria Dolorosa de Padillas. We have said that she was virtuous, but the more virtuous she was, the more was she worthy of a rich, kind, agreeable husband, an open-handed soldier, who, if somewhat older than herself, was still of an erect and aristocratic bearing, and who rode like an English foxhunter. *Bref*, the Colonel's suit prospered, and as he happened to be a Catholic, there would have been no difficulty, had Lord Rookbury hired a real priest to solemnize the union between himself and Maria, instead of hiring means for getting the real priest out of the way, and having the rites performed, almost at stage speed, by a deputy of whose history consecration had not been a feature. The happy couple left the gratulating troop, Maria all tears, and smiles, and farewells, and the Colonel all exultation. They had a very pleasant and protracted honeymoon, a five months' wander in the south of France, and then the Earl felt that his duty to his country called him home—and he went.

Too much of a gentleman to leave a lady in an embarrassing position, the Earl, who departed something hastily from the last town of their united route, transmitted, from the first of his separate journey, a considerable sum as a parting gift, and added some excellent advice to Maria to be as moral as possible, and get a new husband, as the old one would not trouble her again. The matter being thus off his mind, the Earl came home, and distinguished himself, in the following session, by two speeches on the necessity of giving religious education to the people. The speeches were made in order to annoy the Government, which Lord Rookbury tearfully described as almost atheistic in its carelessness of Christian duty; but they so struck the religious world, that even Francis Selwyn, who was not deluded, could not prevent Maria's friend from being invited to take the chair at a missionary meeting at Freemasons' Hall. Meantime the Earl could not know, and therefore could not regret, that the lawyer to whom he had entrusted the packet for Maria had appropriated it to his own use; that Maria, suddenly abandoned, had gone through the various stages of wonder, doubt, suspicion, terror, agony, and shame, which have con-

ducted so many women, unbidden, to a world where to be weak is not to be wrong, and wronged, and that, resisting her impulse—for another voice, heard by her alone, pleaded piteously for two lives—the maddening girl found her way to her native village, told her story, bore her child, and died. Lord Rookbury heard no more upon the subject, and when he recollected Maria, used to picture her as having bought herself a shop and a husband with the money he had sent her, and as having waxed fat and shrewish, and altogether a prosperous Spanish matron, who, in her heart, cherished the memory of her Polish Colonel, and preferred her eldest child to her other half-dozen.

The accident by which that eldest child was brought to England when about two years old, has, in part, been put into so many French vaudevilles, and consequently into so many English dramas and novels, that I should be ashamed to repeat it, but for the variation of the story! In all these vaudevilles, dramas, and novels, a couple of travellers, husband and wife, young, rich, kind, but pining in vain for a child, are always upset by the breaking down of that carriage at the corner of that awkward road, and are obliged to pass the night in that obscure village, and they suffer from the garlic and fleas of the one inn. They always get into conversation with the landlady, and from her they hear the piteous story how the child of seduction died, and how *her* child lives at yonder little homestead with its grandparents. They always buy the child, and promising to bring it up as their own, take it away in the carriage—its next appearance being as a beautiful young girl, with a certain locket of dark hair, over which she cries when it is desirable to remind the reader or the audience of the sad fate of her mother. But though this, or nearly this, did happen in our little Angela's case (and the dates when this kind of vaudeville story began to be used, will show that some French dramatist, travelling in Spain, must have picked up our little history), all the people who treat it elegantly depart from the truth. The couple who thus appropriated Angela were neither young nor kind, and their whim of adopting her was in very small degree prompted by pity for the poor thing herself. Mr. and Mrs. Adams, the former of whom had gained much gold, and both much other yellowness, in the West Indies, had long meditated some such *coup* in order to extinguish the hopes and get rid of

the attentions of a mass of hungry relatives, whose affectionate assiduities irritated the cranky, keen-sighted, nervous couple. They had designed, on returning from their French tour, from which they had deflected for the sake of "having been" in Spain, to select a protégé who should rout the whole cousinly legion, with great dislocation of noses. Little Angela seemed just the thing they wanted, the rather as Mrs. Adams (the daughter of a coal-owner, and therefore naturally partial to the aristocracy), would be able to supply the unknown little creature with a noble pedigree, not so easily affixed to a little Brown or Jones. They took her off. Now must I say it. Angela made herself such an abominable little nuisance from beyond the Pyrenees to the "Fountain" at Canterbury, did so continually bemoan and bewail herself, shriek, roar, shout, scratch, and generally revolt, that not only did she embitter the whole return journey, and ruin her own prospects, but caused such wrathfulness between her protectors, that they actually quarrelled as to how she should be got rid of the instant on reaching London. The disagreeable little creature was ultimately conveyed to the suburb where the Lobbs resided, and, with no noble pedigree at all, but with the character of being deeply imbrued with all the vice which two years can teach, was consigned to the keeping of Mrs. Lobb, an old acquaintance, some said a former fellow-servant of Mrs. Adams. Now, no French vaudeville-maker ever dared to tell a true, flat history like that, far less would a genteel English writer stoop to such a vulgar climax.

Mrs. Lobb, for all her vulgarity—and you may remember that she had a habit of going into fits—was a very warm-hearted washerwoman; and the little Angela was far better off in that poky hole, with the steam of the tubs rising perpetually before her eyes, than she would have been in Mrs. Adams's fine place, Varnish Villa, where pastiles were perpetually smoking in the most elegant manner. She—Mrs. Lobb—"took to the child," as her own phrase went, and the child, finding out, with that marvellous instinct which we grown-up people sometimes lack, whether she were liked or not, adapted herself to circumstances, and became the pet of the family. How she grew up in beauty, and on an emergency was once pressed into theatrical life, in the capacity of a Cupid dangling from a wire, thenceforth joining the profession, until she became the star we saw her; how

Mrs. Adams continued to pay a small pittance for her, which was one day sent back, with contumelious phrases, by Mrs. Lobb, in consequence of Mrs. Adams's haughtiness on Mrs. Lobb's having called to see her, and how that supply thenceforth ceased; how the Lobbs rose a little, had a better home, and how greatly Angela's salary helped them, and so forth, we shall pass over, as much of our little girl's history as 's necessary to be known having been thus truthfully set forth; and one hates to write about low people.

But a sharp-witted reader—and we desire none other—instantly demands how Lord Rookbury became aware that the child of Maria Dolorosa de Padillas was the star of the suburban theatre, in whose pit we have seen him making his paternal survey. The question is too reasonable to be unanswered, even if we had not another purpose in giving the information.

Years passed, times changed, and tastes with them—it is not worth while quoting the Latin—and Spanish dancing had another chance in London. Criticism had greatly improved, and this time the resources of highly cultivated and ingenious literary minds were brought to bear, after graceful and scholarly fashion, in favour of the liberally shown limbs of the ballet. Metaphysics were employed, and analytic as well as synthetic investigation was adopted, and even Greek was quoted (in Greek letters, too,) and the public were told, not only to like the new exhibition, but that any one who did not admire and reverence it was an ignorant beast. Now, nobody likes to be told, by first-rate men, that he is an ignorant beast; and the public set itself to like the dancers, and this time the manager was enriched. Lord Rookbury helped to enrich him, by taking a capital private box, and getting it, by a neat little device, one-third cheaper than he ought to have done. If he wished to save his money, he had better have done so honourably, and had a cheap box upstairs.

Because, had he done so, instead of sitting close to the stage, and occasionally getting the full glare of the foot-lights upon his remarkable face, he would have escaped,—first the careless look, then the arrested attention, and finally the determined recognition of one of the men who figured so picturesquely before him, and who, visiting England for the second time, after an interval of many years, discovered in the distinguished aristocrat of the

proscenium box, the Polish Colonel who had taken away Maria.

CHAPTER LI.

WHAT IS NEVER THROWN AWAY.



OUR or five days elapsed, and Carlyon received no reply either from Lilian or from Mrs. Wilmslow. But one morning a very small note presented itself at his breakfast table. It was in a female hand with which he was not familiar. Rather a curious sensation passed over him as he read it :—

“Mary Maynard wants to see you very particularly indeed, and for your own interests. Do not tell anybody, but be looking at that great cannon on the dragon in the Park, exactly at eleven o'clock to-day. You need apprehend *no danger*, as M. M. wears a veil, and will keep it down during the whole interview.”

He was of course punctual, and Miss Maynard had evidently resolved to be equally so, for she came up rather flushed, and slightly out of breath. Her walk was very decorous then, but it was quite possible that she had disregarded the proprieties to the extent of running a little, just before she came in sight. Mary looked exceedingly well and piquante in a black bonnet, and a little infusion of red, either among the flowers inside, or the dark curls, just lighted up the precincts behind the promised veil. As they met, she placed her hand in Bernard's, but there was no coquetry in the action this time.

“I have but a few minutes, Mr. Carlyon,” she said, “as I must be back and in my room again before Lucy Forester wakes and rings. And you have no time to lose whatever. No, no,” she added, seeing from his answer, that he thought she alluded to the duties of his office,—“I mean more than that. If I had time to begin properly I would say,” she went on hurriedly, as if she had prepared the words, but had scarcely courage to speak them,—“that you have thought ill of me, and with reason, and that I desired to remove a part of your ill opinion, and show that

I am not quite such a strange creature as you may suppose. But we really have not time for that, and you must take what I have to say for what it is worth. Mr. Heywood means no good to you."

"I know he means none," replied Bernard; "but I am sincerely grateful to you for—"

"Don't tell me," interrupted Mary, impatiently, "I mean—I am very *brusque*—but let me speak. He means no good to a person—to the young lady to whom you are engaged."

"And, may I ask," said Carlyon, "how you obtain this knowledge?"

"By listening at a hole which I cut in the wall behind a picture in Lucy's room. Dreadfully unladylike, wasn't it? But that can't be helped, can it? I think Mr. Heywood goes a little mad, now and then—and yet I don't know. It would be delightful to have a lover so thoroughly in earnest, if one were quite sure he would not take an opportunity of killing you."

"And is he Mrs. Forester's lover?"

"You know better than that," said Miss Maynard, reproachfully; "but I see that you think I am not to be believed or trusted. However, I will tell you all the same, and if I do you any good, you may perhaps think better of me some day. Hold your tongue—don't tell me—besides, we have no time. Now listen. I have heard Mr. Heywood declare to Mrs. Forester, in the most awful manner, that Miss Lilian Trevelyan should never be your wife, and I am certain that he meditates some treachery."

"Very likely," said Bernard, quietly. "He declared the same thing to me. My friend Mrs. Forester might have had the kindness, however, to give me a hint."

"Mrs. Forester does not like you, Mr. Carlyon," said Mary, "and there is no use in hiding it. I do not know why—at least I can only guess. And if she knew that I had met you in this way, I should come to grief."

"And that I should most deeply regret," said Bernard. "I thank you most heartily for what you have done."

"But I do not think you quite understand what I tell you," said Miss Maynard, anxiously. "See here, I heard this conversation on Monday night."

"The very day Mr. Heywood had been with me," said Car-

lyon. "We had an angry interview, and what you heard was the end of a storm."

"I wish I could think it were the end," said Mary. "I only know that he said the time had come for action, that he got Lucy to change several banknotes for sovereigns, which he always keeps—it is one of her fancies that the Bank will stop some day—and that he has not been to the house since."

"There is not, certainly, much in all that," said Carlyon, slowly, and considering the information; "and these men who talk about action never act—besides—ah, sovereigns! I wonder whether he is going after Wilmslow. I don't know why he should."

"One thing more," said Mary, "he borrowed Lucy's beautiful large cloak, lined with white fur."

"The Sybarite!" said Bernard.

"Don't tell me," said Mary, impatiently. "I see that you do not suspect anything wrong; and now if I tell you what I believe, you will call me a foolish romance-reading little idiot."

"What do you believe, Miss Maynard?" said Bernard, more seriously than he had spoken before.

"That he is going to carry your Miss Lilian off—and perhaps has done so already," said the girl, in a provoked tone. "Perhaps he has got her consent," she added, with some little malice.

"Her consent," repeated Bernard, with a smile. "But you do not know her."

"No. And you will take care that Mary Maynard shall never know Lilian Carlyon," she added, still bitterly. "That of course. But I don't believe she ever will bear that name."

"There is one thing," said Bernard, not wishing to irritate her, "of which you cannot be aware. Mr. Heywood is a priest."

"I know that. And a priest who gives himself over to his passions is just the person to do the maddest and most unheard-of things. If you had heard his tones, Mr. Carlyon, when he swore—yes—swore between his teeth that you should never have her—I don't think you would put much faith in his holy vows, or whatever you call them."

The strangeness of the ideas which rapidly crossed Bernard's

mind kept him silent for a few moments, and Mary Maynard added, with the quick suspicion of her nature,—

"You are ashamed to own that such a girl as I am should see more than you do? I understand you."

"Nothing of the kind," said Bernard. "Do not, I pray you, be so needlessly susceptible. I was considering all that you had said. It is an odd coincidence, that though I have for several days been expecting a letter from Miss Trevelyan, I have received none."

"Coincidence! How do you know that she is not imprisoned, and reproaching you with not delivering her? I know that if I were a man, and the least hint of such a thing had been breathed to me, I would have been all over the country finding out the truth."

"They do not imprison young ladies in these days," said Carlyon.

"And Rookbury never imprisoned any at Rooklin?" replied his impetuous companion.

"Did you hear of that?" asked Bernard, smiling. "It was only a whim of the old man's—very unjustifiable, of course, but still a mere caprice."

"No doubt. And you would say the same if Mr. Heywood, for a whim and caprice, locked up Miss Lilian Trevelyan? However, I have done, and I must go away, or Lucy will find me out. There, never mind thanks—don't tell me—besides, I have done no good—Oh, I have, have I? Very well; good-bye, all the same. You see," she added, slightly blushing, as she drew away her hand, which he had retained for a moment, "a kiss is never thrown away."

He returned to his office, with his mind more perturbed than he had thought anything which Mary Maynard could say would have had power to render it. And the perturbation increased hour by hour. When a person whose mental position we rank much below our own makes an unwelcome assertion, it is curious how hard our offended mind fights against it. But it is this very fighting, this perpetually rushing to meet the enemy face to face, that makes us so familiar with the disagreeable idea as to render its banishment impossible. And thus the notion, originally that strange girl's, and at once rejected by the *sagacious* and practical Secretary of a Department, could not be dis-

missed with the contempt it merited, but haunted him through the day, held conferences with him when he was alone, accompanied him to the apartment of his *chef*, attended him when he introduced deputations, and, growing bolder and bolder as the day advanced, insisted, when he left the office, that he should depart for Lynfield, and see Lilian.

When he reached Lynfield, on the following morning, which was Sunday, Lilian had gone, and Mardyke's House was empty.

CHAPTER LII.

ANOTHER WATCHER.



AFTER vain inquiries in every promising and unpromising quarter, Carlyon could think of no better course than to return to town, where some letter from Miss Trevelyan might by that time be awaiting him. But as he was within a few miles of Aspen Court, and as he knew that, thanks to an express train, he might so manage that his arrival in town would not be delayed by his crossing to see Mrs. Wilmslow, he obtained a horse, and speedily found himself once more before the old house. Two young ladies came to meet him as he entered the hall. One of them, Emma Wilmslow, held out her hand with a smile, and if there were anything of innocent mischief in the look with which she introduced her companion, Bernard quite forgave it, for that companion was Lilian herself!

With some little trepidation, lest the step she had taken should not be quite approved, Lilian hastened to explain that she had received the letter which Bernard had requested her to forward to Mrs. Wilmslow, and that his epistle to herself, which accompanied it, had been written so warmly and earnestly, that she had felt that his heart was interested in the safe delivery of the other despatch. And so, without any hesitation, she had returned to the home whence her family had been expelled, and begging to see Jane, had given her the letter, and simply and frankly explained why she had taken such a liberty. Everybody who knows dear Jane Wilmslow knows what sort of a reception she was likely to give to such a messenger, and in the very briefest time conceivable, two of the girls had become

enchanted with her, and the third, who had certain private feelings of her own at the sight of the beautiful stranger, had another feeling which enjoined her to be even more attentive, and more friendly in her manner, than perhaps Miss Kate would have been had Lilian's name been previously unknown to her. As for Amy, she had declared, with more energy than she had shown for many a day, that Lilian's was the most angelic face that ever was made ; and the poor child, with her habitual frankness, did not wait for Miss Trevelyan's absence, to pronounce this judgment, adding, that she herself was soon going among the angels, and had a right to speak. So Lilian having already had an opportunity of blushing and of crying among her new friends, was quite as much at home with them as a girl needed to be, by the time her lover arrived.

Bernard, of course, was delighted ; first, at finding her at all, and secondly, at finding her there, and he was additionally pleased to learn that Mrs. Wilmslow had absolutely ordained that Lilian should not be permitted to depart for a great while, and had charged her daughters with the execution of that decree.

There was Lilian, therefore, in the very place whence Bernard Carlyon's legal industry had so mainly contributed to expel her. He had at least the satisfaction of thinking that he had brought her back.

Even to that household, waiting for the inevitable stroke which was to deprive them of their treasure, Lilian's presence brought sunshine. Trained to minister to the suffering mind of her own unhappy relative, she at once found her place beside the couch of Amy ; and the child never felt, even for a moment, that a stranger had joined the loving group that watched her in waking and in sleeping. She felt but that another kind face bent over her, another soft hand bathed her forehead, another gentle voice spoke to her in affectionate accents. Amy seemed to have one sister more,—so naturally and readily had Lilian glided into the circle. But to the other hearts that mourned around the dying child, there was something of new and actual consolation in the sympathy of the beautiful girl who had thus come among them ;—something of strength and succour was imparted by her cheerfulness ;—something of resignation by her humble but earnest devotion. But when the hour of united prayer arrived,

and the fair head of the young Catholic bent with the rest around the couch of Amy, while the mother's voice offered the petition for health,—if it were His will,—for patience, be that will what it might, Jane, raising her tearful eyes, and seeing the fading sun-ray upon Lilian's golden curls, bowed her own head in a convulsion of sorrow. The picture before her was one of exquisite beauty, but of an unutterable grief. It seemed to her that an angel had come, and was but tarrying, in indulgent forbearance, that they might prepare for the parting, and then the signal was to be given that should call the child away.

One thought was spared to them all, save to Lilian Trevelyan, and that was the thought that the ruin before them had been fearfully hastened by the act of one to whom Lilian's life had been long devoted—the unhappy Eustace ; whose madness had devised the hideous spectacle which struck down the child in her first joyous hurrying through her new home. . . . Lilian had heard of this, through her lover, and as she knelt by Amy's pillow, a shudder mingled with her prayer, and a resistless impulse bade her suddenly raise her eyes, and seek, in the child's face, for the terror which that sad moment had implanted there. She found it not, but the gesture caught Amy's attention, and their eyes met. The child's old vivacity had not left her ; and just as in her still younger life she had often risked a levity while religious service was proceeding, she answered with a furtive smile and a glance of pretended demureness. It was hard to think that the playful eye was closing for the last sleep.

But the prayer has been said, and the embrace given, and while the girls attend upon Amy, the mother leaves them, and joins Bernard, who had begged to be permitted to stay at Aspen Court, but upon condition that he were treated not as a guest, but as one who might come and go at will.

Jane had read and re-read the earnest letter which Carlyon had addressed to her, and in which he had expressed his belief that Molesworth meant honestly, and Mrs. Wilmslow willingly acceded to that belief. She was but too glad of any justification for her believing well of an old friend. But when she spoke of Lord Rookbury, and of the possibility of his also intending them kindness, Bernard was very intolerant, and refused to permit her to interpret one act of the Earl's into anything but the proof of a selfish purpose.

"Yet you did not think so hardly of him, Bernard, when you were last here," said Mrs. Wilmslow.

"If I led you to think at all indulgently of him, I regret it," said Carlyon. "But we need not speak of the past. For the future, look upon him only as an enemy."

"And shut my door upon him?" asked Mrs. Wilmslow, somewhat tremulously, for she had a nervous terror of making the least harsh demonstration.

"Because he is an enemy? No—it is wiser to bid an enemy welcome. At least, it gives us a new chance of understanding him."

She looked up at Bernard, perhaps with a little motherly compassion, and answered, very kindly—

"You have chosen a sweet girl, Bernard, and in time she will teach you a better rule. We *are* to bid an enemy welcome at all times. If he is hungry, feed him :—if he thirst, give him drink :—did you ever hear those words?"

"Yes," said Carlyon, gravely ; "and the reason why we are so to treat him. Lord Rookbury's head is proof against any such coals of fire. Do not think to warm him into any honest feeling. But I am rejoiced to hear you speak as you do of one very dear to me. I had not the slightest idea of finding her here ; but she explains to me that I seemed so exceedingly earnest in what I wrote to yourself and to her, that at all risk of intruding upon you, or of allowing you to imagine that my influence over her was too great—you know what I mean, dear lady—she determined to see that my wishes were carried out ; and having nobody around her who could be trusted, she set out to be my messenger herself. I hope that you understand her motives.—I am sure that you do."

"And I am very glad," answered Jane, with a smile, which, before her days of grief, would have had a little archness, "that you are so thoroughly serious in desiring that she should be appreciated, and that you can speak earnestly and naturally for her. But who can look at her and not love her?"

"I cannot," said Bernard Carlyon, frankly enough. "But this is not a time to intrude thoughts of my own hopes or happiness upon you."

"Lilian could never have been more welcome to me than at *this sad hour*, Bernard," replied Jane, passionately. "And God

grant that she may never know a mother's sorrow more closely than now.—Well, you will stay with us your own time.—*You* want no assurance of being welcome.”

CHAPTER LIII.

MORE WARNINGS.



SOME days passed, and Lilian still remained at Aspen Court, every hour rendering her more dear to its inmates. Mrs. Wilmslow became conscious of a strange impression, which she confided to none, but which gradually assumed the form of a settled conviction. She felt that Lilian's arrival bore the character of a warning, and that she would not, could not depart, until another departure, and a sadder one, had been taken. It was in vain that the poor mother sought to disenthral herself from this thought, to reason on its folly, and even to relieve herself by mentally fixing a time when Lilian should leave her. The fear grew and strengthened, the shadow deepened and darkened ; and Jane, wandering away from her children, to pace the old hall in the twilight, would repeat to herself in her low, quiet voice, that her little Amy's hour was come.

Bernard had also tarried. It was not strange that he should linger where Lilian was, and though he attached no particular weight to the story which Mary Maynard had told him, her communication formed, perhaps without his own knowledge, an additional reason for his remaining. His interviews with Miss Trevelyan were not frequent, and were brief, for the beautiful girl seemed to have accepted a duty, that of watcher by the side of Amy, and Carlyon would not seek to withdraw her from that gentle mission. They spoke together freely and lovingly, but each was conscious of conversing in a graver, calmer voice than had been habitual. Lilian's playfulness had passed away, and Bernard had forgotten to point his words, and to speak of the world as of an enemy.

One evening, leaving the house, he crossed the lawn before it, and made his way toward the little coppice where, on his first introduction to Lilian, he had delivered her from the robbers. He had perhaps no particular object in selecting this path, but

it recalled to him so much, that, having entered the cluster of trees, and made out the exact scene of the affray, he remained, musing on his own prospects, on his love, on Heywood's wild rivalry, and on the thousand incidents which were interwoven with all these themes, until the twilight had almost become darkness. The distant glancing of a light in one of the windows of the house, seen through a gap, remindnd him of the time that had passed. He had been sitting at the foot of a large tree, and resting against its trunk, and he was about to rise, when a voice at a little distance said, in an under tone,—

"If you'd keep as you be, Sir, a minit, it ud oblige." The voice seemed to come from some one on the ground, who had endeavoured to avoid startling the hearer. Bernard's nerves were steady, but the locality was one in which he had been engaged in certain violent dealings, and it was not difficult to feel that his share in that scene might be about to be avenged. He did not rise, however, but prepared to spring to his feet at a moment's notice.

"Well, and who is to be obliged?" he said.

"A friend, Sir, if I might say as much. It ud be out of the way to say that perhaps the friend is known."

"I know the voice," said Bernard.

"Ladies in a trap,—likewise pike, Jew fence, and Bully Bowmudge," said the other, paying out his reminiscences with a jerk a-piece.

"Mr. Shotton, of course," said Carlyon. "And what brings you here? And being here, why are you not at the house? What you did for the ladies will never be forgotten, and you have only to show yourself there to be sure of receiving all kindness."

"Me did," repeated the Smiling Stunner, for it was that stalwart champion, who was resting with his broad bosom against that of the earth. "Don't say nothing about that, if you please, Mr. Barnard. I've often said to myself since that night, Dick Shotton, you're a blackguard, and that's the mildest way to put it, and I could say much more to you."

"Well, I suppose you are about the only person in the world that could say so safely," replied Bernard; "but I don't see why you should say it at all. You're help came in most nobly."

"Not much of that, neither, Sir," returned the boxer; "but what I put it upon is this, and that sows me up. Where was you, Dick Shotton, says I, that you never struck in before? Skulking, Dick, that's about what you was, skulking. Skulking's the measure of your pluck, Mr. Dick, neither more nor less, my lad. I spelt it all out to my Alice, and she as good as said as much, and she knows what behaving means, having seen the same promiscuous. That's the size of it, Mr. Barnard, Sir."

"That's not the way the ladies looked at the matter, Mr. Shotton. They only recollect that you came in most bravely, and saved them from a whole mob of ruffians."

"May be, Sir, may be not. But never did I say one word, nor even do so much as to raise my fist, till that young lady—the small one—begging her pardon and yours for naming such a thing, and we're all as God made us, I've heard, and big and little is no odds,—that's so, Sir, I believe?" He paused to be assured on this point, and then went on,—“Till that young lady named your name, did I speak a word. Didn't I let 'em be bothered and frighted by the other coves, and Bully Bowmudge, too? I'd like to see her again, though, if she warn't too proud, as in reason she ought to be, and tell her *this*, which it's like she mayn't believe, but it's true.

"You will never see her again, Shotton," said Carlyon, gravely. "Here, come to the higher part of the ground."

The huge figure of the boxer rose, and presented a dark mass against the night sky. He followed Bernard to a point whence nearly the whole front of the house could be seen.

"You see two windows, with red curtains, and the light showing through. Just behind the furthest of those that little girl is lying, dying."

The boxer's answer was a tremendous oath—in words—in meaning it was simply an expression of extreme astonishment and concern.

"You would like her to know," said Carlyon, after a pause; "that whether she had mentioned me or not, you would have protected her, if those fellows had proceeded to outrage. She shall. And now, what brings you here?"

"I came after you, Sir,—no offence?"

"After me. And why?"

"There's a cross somewhere, Sir."

"Too many crosses, Shotton. Most of the world's fights are crosses. What have you to tell me?"

"I know I'm on the lay, the right lay, that is, Sir. But still it ud be a comfort to be told so. You'd answer a question, Sir?"

"Any question you can ask."

"That house—the big un, you see it, Sir?" and he insisted on pointing out Aspen Court to Carlyon, and being sure that he saw it, and no other.

"What other house can you see?"

"No offence, Sir.—That house there," and again he pointed, "has a name, I'm told."

"Aspen Court."

"And the landlord's, leastways the owner's name, Sir? I know he's in trouble," added Mr. Shotton, whispering loud, "but it won't hurt him to mention it. Or you might name it dark."

"No need of concealment, that I know of. His name is Wilmslow,—Mr. Henry Wilmslow, but he is on the continent."

"No, Sir, no. I've got the office, and I don't mind putting you up. He's in France."

"The same thing, Shotton," said Bernard. "But what of this?"

"To be sure I was on the lay, which I am, Sir. That's the house. Now, Sir, there's ladies in that house, but no gentleman, nor no man neither."

"I am staying there, at present."

"You're going to stop where you are, Sir."

"My stay is uncertain; but what does all this mean?"

"There's some one in that house, Sir, as you've hit out for afore, and if it came to hitting out for them again, I suppose it ud be done."

"It was done where you stand," said Carlyon.

"Was it now?" said Shotton, in a tone of the most real and tender interest. "Where I stand? And a very good place for it, too. And it ud be done again, I'll be bound."

"Most certainly," said Carlyon, smiling.

"Then lookey here, Sir. You stay in that house—that one," (again pointing to prevent mistake,) "and if there's hitting out, look round for Dick Shotton, and if you don't see him, say he's a thief and a skulker. Now I'd go into that house, if I was you, Sir."

"Stay," said Bernard. "I have perfect confidence in you, Shotton. If this were only a matter concerning myself, and I knew that you, Dick, would be by me, I'd take my chance, and ask no questions. But you may not be at the bottom of this business. Who is?"

"And that's what I can't tell you, Sir, by reason that I don't know.—Only this,—he was know'd by his smell."

"By his smell?"

"Just that. He's a doctor. That's what he is."

"A doctor. Any sort of guess at his name, or where he lives?"

"He said his name were Wood, but in course he didn't want parties to believe that, and in course they didn't, more by token that it happened his handkerchief were borrowed, as it were, by a young lad, and after he were gone out, the writing in the corner were overhauled, and the letter didn't go to spell Wood, but Mahogany."

"The letter M then," said Carlyon, eagerly.

"Can't say how that might be, Sir; but Mahogany were told me, which is Wood, too, I've heerd."

"I don't see any clue, yet," said Bernard. "And you have no notion where he came from."

"Nobody axed him, Sir, but he said Suffolk, quite uncalled for. But the same young lad, while he were about it, borrowed a bit of a railway card, a tore one, half a journey like, and that were marked Glorster. Maybe that's near Suffolk."

"Gloucester. Ah!" said Bernard.

"Smell a rat, Sir, meaning a doctor?"

"I think I am on the scent, anyhow," said Carlyon. "And you won't tell me what this man proposed when he came with his coat buttoned up, into that public-house, and passed himself off as Mr. Wood of Suffolk."

"I beg your pardon, Sir, but I never said his coat were buttoned up, or anything about a public-house."

"If it hadn't been buttoned up close, your young friend would have had his pocket-book, or letters, and then you'd have known his name; and if it had not been a public-house, he wouldn't have allowed a lad to be in the company."

"I didn't say it were a house at all."

"No, but you spoke of his having gone out. Do you think I don't attend to what you tell me?"

"By gosh," said Dick Shotton, good-humouredly, "and begging your pardon, if I do not stop talking you'll get out more than I want to tell, and that won't do, Sir—I'm off. No offence, Sir, but I can't trust my blessed tongue. All I say, Sir, is, when the office is hitting out, look round for me. Good night, Sir." And as if afraid of being persuaded to stop, he went off very fast, and singing with all his might as uncouth a song as ever aroused the Dryads of Aspen.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE DECOY.



IN the house in Park Street, where Lucy Forester had entertained her young friends after the opera, she was giving reluctant audience to the priest Heywood. Not, however, in the apartment where Miss Maynard's little demonstration was made, but in a small drawing-room, bounded by a tiny conservatory, which, with its tableau of coloured glass, bright flowers, and glancing fishes, formed a sort of kaleidoscopic finish to her pretty set of narrow rooms, opening into one another.

"The scheme is so wild, so mad, Cyprian."

"I am wild and mad too. But you will carry it out for me."

"You are merciless. I have not often scrupled at obeying you; but now, for the sake of a whim, of which you will get weary while you are actually carrying it out, you ask me to ruin all the hopes of my life. Do consider this."

"The hopes of your life," repeated Heywood slowly, as if not comprehending, or caring to comprehend her. "The—hopes—of—your—life."

"Yes. But I see that your mind is wandering at this moment."

"It is not. It is fixed upon one purpose, and that purpose I have come here to bid you help me to accomplish. I tell you that I will carry her away, embark with her for America, and there—" he paused abruptly.

"And there?"

"Once embarked, neither you nor any one in England need have further concern for us."

"Folly."

"Be it so. The thought of the attempt is all that preserves me from something madder still. But it is not for you, Lucy Forester, to oppose my will, or question my course. Don't you feel that it is not?" he said, almost insultingly.

"One thing gives you a fatal power over me, which I hope, I implore that you will not abuse," said Mrs. Forester, trembling, and with her proud, resolute lip in a quiver.

"I will use it to obtain my purpose—no further," said Heywood, confronting her with a gaze strangely unlike the exceedingly courteous, and even indulgent manner he usually adopted with women. "But up to that point I will use it without the faintest hesitation. Understand that."

"To plead to your heart when passion is working with you, is hopeless," said Lucy Forester. "But your sense of justice cannot be quite dead—and I ask you—are you not doing me a great and a deep wrong? You know the object of my life—you have aided me by your counsel and otherwise in my efforts to gain it—you have given me a right to believe you my friend, and now you ask me to do that which must for ever dash all my hopes to the ground. Is this just?"

"Nothing is just," said Heywood fiercely. "But I am past the state in which we bandy common-place reproaches. I must have obedience."

"Think what it is you demand. That I should go down to this country place, and by a false tale should lure this young lady from her home into a travelling-carriage, and continue to amuse her with other falsehoods until she can be induced to embark with you. This conspiracy—there is no other name for it, Cyprian—you propose to me, whose dream of life has been a union with the best and proudest man in England—one who would trample me under his feet if he believed I had even endured to hear a whisper of such a plot."

"Well, refuse."

"Nay, do not speak so sternly, so cruelly," said the beautiful woman, with tears in her eyes. "I am not refusing, but—"

"But you are not obeying. You are a gambler, Lucy Forester, and yet you cannot count your chances. Do as I

wish, and when we have left England you may pursue your plot upon Selwyn, and will probably attain your object, for a woman in earnest can marry any man she pleases. But refuse, and then calculate probabilities. Selwyn, the Christian gentleman, the stern moralist—the purist—the Evangelical Bayard, what will he say to a gambling wife?”

“And you would—you really *would* have the baseness——”

“I am not afraid of words.”

“No, no, I am not using harsh words,” said poor Lucy, terrified out of all her pride. “I did not mean baseness, but cruelty: it would be cruelty, Cyprian, wicked cruelty, for which you would never forgive yourself.”

“You under-estimate my placability, dear friend,” said the priest, in his old sarcastic manner.

“And you would inform Francis Selwyn——”

“I would call upon Francis Selwyn, and I would apologise for the intrusion by explaining its object, namely, to enable him to obtain possession of certain written acknowledgments of gambling debts, incurred by a lady in whom the world believes that he takes a tender interest. My opinion is, that he would give me a cheque for the money.”

“Good Heaven! why do you think so?” exclaimed Mrs. Forester, startled.

“Because, despite his stateliness, I believe that he loves you,” said the Jesuit.

“*You* say this? O! you say it only to torment me,” replied Lucy, piteously.

“No, only to force you to my own purpose. I have watched him, and I can watch to some purpose, as my friend Mrs. Forester knows,” he added.

“She does, indeed. O, Cyprian,” said Lucy, sobbing, “he loves me, and you would ruin me. I know him. If he ransomed those hateful papers, it would be but to send them to me, with a message that we were parted for ever and ever.”

“It would be so,” said the tempter, “but he loves you. Choose, therefore, between the certainty of ruin to your ambition, and the chance of being permitted to pursue it. Come, you have appealed to my justice, I will show you that I can even be generous. The first post from the first port at which I land shall bring you those papers cancelled, receipted.”

"You promise, when you can threaten," said Mrs. Forester, "and it is useless for me to murmur. But I see nothing but defeat and disgrace before us."

"I will run all risks," said Heywood, "and you will run them with me. That is decided. Now, my plans are matured, and so far as you need know them, they are these. On the third night from this, a steamer will leave Bristol with Lilian Trevelyan and myself on board. Your work will be to place Lilian upon the deck of that vessel, the rest is for me. I will do myself the honour of accompanying you to Lynfield, where she resides, and of pointing out the house. You will bring her to Bristol, and your servants will need no instructions from you. The carriage will be driven direct to the place of embarkation, and will arrive neither too soon nor too late. All has been thought of."

"No," said Mrs. Forester, "all has not been thought of. Lilian loves, and has a lover."

Heywood ground his teeth.

"For her love," he said, "I will say nothing now. For her lover, be assured he will be remembered." He added the word with a strangely vicious expression, of a kind seldom seen upon his noble features, and one which seemed unnatural there.

"You tell me that you and Mr. Carlyon have exchanged insults and defiance, and that you have threatened him. Is there any likelihood of his having taken the alarm, and being on the watch?"

"None," said Heywood. "He has spirit, but is one of your practical men, who never dream of action, if out of the ordinary routine."

"You have not read him rightly, Cyprian Heywood. The eyes of hate are clear, but they magnify falsely. I know him better. He has cautioned Miss Trevelyan; and has, probably, placed a watch upon her."

"May it be so, and may he keep that watch!" said Heywood, with a laugh. "He is proud of certain physical activity and skill—I tell you that he will be remembered."

"Violence, too," said Lucy, turning pale.

"Not a chance of such a thing," said Heywood, who treated this manifestation, which he knew to be genuine, with indul-

gence ; and was eager to remove Lucy's apprehensions.—“Not a chance of it. No,” he added, earnestly, “I would not ask you to join in any scheme involving the least roughness or constraint. All will be as smooth, as prompt, and as orderly, as if you were taking the young lady to a court-ball.”

“And the girl herself. I have never seen her. Is she likely to be deceived by my story about her uncle?”

“Told as you will tell it,” said Heywood, significantly.

“Heaven help me, that I should be reduced to submit to such a necessity!” said Lucy, passionately.

“A necessity demands no remorse,” said the priest.

“Do not mock me with your sophisms. It is *no* necessity, then,” said Lucy. “I am about to do a wicked action for the sake of gratifying my own affection and ambition. I ought to renounce my object,—refuse to commit this act, and take the consequences,—be they what they may.”

“Perhaps so,” said the priest, “but your conviction does not disappoint my hopes ; because I have observed, that the next step of man or woman, who avows distinctly, that the path of duty is clear, is, invariably, to walk right out of it. This is intellectual pride ;—one of the deadly sins, Mrs. Forester.—You don't mind doing wrong, but you will not have it supposed that you sin out of stupidity, and not knowing that you sin.”

“Your mocking tone is very fitting at such a time,” said Lucy, almost bitterly.

“May you never know the state in which it is comfort to mock yourself and every created thing around you!” said Heywood.

“But let us end such talk. Need I say more, than that a carriage will be at your door on Thursday morning, to take you to the railway,—not, of course, your own, nor should your servants know which way you travel.”

“I cannot travel without a maid,” said Lucy, with determination.

“I suppose not,—I suppose not. And yet, for your own sake, it is bad to be in anybody's power.”

Mrs. Forester almost groaned assent.

“But,” continued Heywood, “it is worse to be in a menial's ; because you have no social hold on him, and he has nothing to fear from your revenge.”

“Much as one stands with a Jesuit,” said Lucy, who having

assented to the work prepared her, did not now fear to speak out.

"True," said Heywood, gently, having carried his point, and not desiring to annoy Lucy unnecessarily. "But as for your maid,—why not take the amiable Miss Maynard? There are several reasons," he added, with a short laugh, "why that bosom friend of Mr. Carlyon's should assist in doing him a service."

"I *will* take Polly Maynard," said Mrs. Forester, suddenly and with energy.

The priest looked surprised, for a moment, at her tone; but man soon becomes weary of analysing woman's emotions, and, towards the end of a passionate interview, huddles them up, very carelessly, under the general head of excitement. So it was with Cyprian Heywood, who had triumphed, and cared not to question further.

"On Thursday, at half-past ten, exactly," he said, "the carriage will be at your door. Meantime, were I you, I would think as little as possible about the little drama we have to play. Nothing spoils a performance like over-rehearsal."

CHAPTER LV.

LIGHT FROM WITHIN.



STRANGE sight was seen in Aspen Court that night.

The room in which little Amy lay opened into a second apartment, which could be entered without passing through hers. In this second room it had been the custom of her sisters to remain, when it was thought well to leave the child to repose, and here were prepared her refreshments, and many of the arrangements for her comfort were made, in order to avoid causing her the excitement which, to one so fragile, is occasioned by the sight of any person engaged in occupation, however gentle.

It was early in the night, and at Lilian's especial petition, Mrs. Wilmslow and the two girls had left her in charge of Amy, while they walked in the fresh air, and the bright moonlight. In an hour, at the most, it was agreed, that her guard should be

relieved. Amy had kissed them all, and had sunk into a light slumber ; and Lilian, removing the lamp from the sleeping-chamber, had taken her seat in the outer room, ready at the slightest sound or signal from the fading child.

Her watch had been brief, when the lamp flickered, and was extinguished.

Noiselessly Lilian stole from the room, and descended the stairs. Some delay took place while she was obtaining another lamp from the domestic below ; but, having procured it, Miss Trevelyan would not wait to light it, the moonrays, which streamed upon the back of the house, affording her ample means of retracing her way to the apartment she had left. Listening for any sound from Amy's chamber, but hearing none, Lilian sat down, still without lighting her lamp, and remained for some time in meditation,—perhaps in prayer.

How long she had thus remained she was uncertain ; when, glancing through the open door which led into Amy's room, she noticed a faint light in a large looking-glass, which stood opposite to the child's bed. Her immediate idea was, that a moon-beam, passing through the unclosed door of her own room, had happened to strike on the mirror ; and lest the reflection should startle Amy when she roused from her sleep, Lilian quietly closed that door.—The faint light in the mirror was still there.

A second thought naturally suggested itself. Some light must have been imperfectly extinguished when the girls went away, and had revived. Lilian stepped softly forward to remove it from the sleeping chamber.

There was no such fire in Amy's room ; but there was a sight there which might well have sent back the blood to a less gentle heart than Lilian's.

The curtains, at the foot of the bed, were parted, and Amy was sitting up. Over her face, and over one arm, from which the night-dress had been drawn up, was gleaming a ghastly and lurid light, somewhat resembling that of the moon, but tinged with a faint blue. It quivered restlessly—phosphorically—about her wasted features ;—now clouding, now shifting, and again swelling out more brightly, and rendering them perfectly visible in the intense darkness of the room. For it was completely darkened :—it was one of the rooms which, in the earlier part of *this narrative*, were described as having been filled up with

modern contrivances ; and shutters that closed hermetically, and thick curtains, excluded every ray from without. Of this, one hurried look assured poor Lilian ;—the next, as her eyes again sought the spectral appearance, brought to her the conviction, that the light she saw was supplied from no external source. It gleamed only from the flesh of Amy—from the face and from the exposed arm ; leaving the dress, the hair, and the pillow, in darkness.—*The light was from within.*

The apparition imparted a strange and unearthly expression to the countenance of the child, and especially to the eyes, which were wide open. Yet the features themselves bore no sign of excitement or of horror. They seemed even stiller, more languid, than was their wont, and to have lost both the animation which had characterised them in health, and the restlessness which had of late marked them during Amy's wakeful hours. At the pauses, when the flickering and ghastly light settled for a moment, the face became calm as that of a statue, and the unsteady, wave-like shifting of the gleams appeared as if caused by a volition distinct from that of the child. Only the whitened lips moved, as in slumber. A martyr, rapt in ecstasy, and unconscious of the lambent flames that were purging soul from body, might in such wise have awaited his starry crown.

Lilian stood in that tremor which paralyses speech and motion, and presently the child turned her glistening face full upon her ; a smile came upon Amy's lips, and Lilian imagined for a moment that her presence had been detected. But it was not so. Amy was murmuring to herself, unaware that a listener was at hand. Part of what she said reached Lilian's ear, but some of her words were scarcely articulate.

"It was very good of God not to let me die until I had come here and seen mamma happy. I should not have liked to die in those lodgings, where the woman was so insolent, and made papa so angry that he struck mamma. That was very dreadful of him, very cruel ; and she mastered herself, because it was before us, and pretended to think he was in play ; but her poor arm—I saw it when she put me to bed. I think he was sorry. I hope he was sorry.

"I should like to speak to mamma about my funeral, but she would begin to sob, or hurry out of the room. Yet she knows I *must* be buried, dear thing. There are several things I

particularly want to tell her. I tried to write them, but something has come to my hands, and I cannot make the letters look well. My writing is as bad as it was when I was a little girl, and they held my hand. I wonder whether people write in heaven. I suppose not, because we shall fly about so fast that we can go to any angel and say what we want to say. When mamma comes, we shall always fly about together, and I shall know all the heavenly plains, and where the flowers are, and take her everywhere.

"I hope they know that I must be buried near the little child that the wicked woman frightened to death. It is very sad that I cannot speak about it without making them cry. I think I will speak to Lilian about it, because it *must* be understood. It is a very good thing that Lilian loves Bernard. My poor fingers are so weak that I cannot work anything for them; but Emmy knows all about that, and she will do it, and give it them when they are married, with my dear love."

There was a long pause—but the lips moved, and the child seemed to be repeating a prayer. The hand hitherto concealed was raised, and joined to the other, and the same unearthly gleam was upon both. Then, sinking back upon her pillow, Amy went on,—

"Everybody loves me so much, that it will be very sad for them when I go away. Most of all for mamma. But I hope that they will come to the church a good deal after I am laid there, and not leave me entirely alone, at least not for some time. I do not want to leave them suddenly, and if God would allow my spirit to be about here, I should like it; but He knows best, and I only say it because it seems kinder not to hurry away.

"O mamma! mamma! I cannot be taken from you—I cannot go away! I am sure you will break your heart—I am sure you will."

And the poor child's sobbing was audible. What followed did not reach Lilian's ear, until Amy said,—

"Sometimes I feel so weary that I could gladly curl myself round like that poor little kitten, and die without giving anybody trouble. I wonder whether I shall die when they are all with me, or in the night, and be found dead in the morning. I think I *should* like to die with mamma's hand at the back of my

head, and her cheek against my cheek ; and I think she would like it too. But God knows best what is good for her. It was very kind of Him to let me live until I had seen her comfortable and happy—comfortable and happy ! If I had died in those lodgings, that hard woman would have come in to look at me, and I should have been buried in that dreary churchyard between the houses. I am glad I have come away from that churchyard ; they must have come away ; and it would have been very sad to leave me in that place. Now I am with them all, and they cannot go away from their own home.

“ I have not had a very long life, but I hope I have tried to be good. I am sure I have loved mamma, and if I had lived longer I would have tried to love her more. I hope I have not been cross while I have been ill. I did not mean it—it was the illness, not me. But I will beg their pardons before I go to sleep to-night. And then they will cry. No, I will not beg their pardons. I think they love me too much to suppose I was in earnest.

“ One thing is certain—*there are no skeletons in heaven.*”

She was silent. Lilian, by an intense effort mastering herself for an instant, hurried from the room ; and as she reached the next apartment, its door opened with a welcome flood of light, and the two other girls entered. Poor Lilian sank upon a couch, in a fainting state, and when partially recovered, could make no reply to their affectionate inquiries beyond signs to them to remain near her. She sought to prevent their witnessing the fearful sight that she had seen. And it strangely chanced that she succeeded ; and when, somewhat later, Mrs. Wilmslow visited Amy's chamber, lamp in hand, the child had drawn the bed-coverings over her, and was slumbering.

Not a word to Jane or to her daughters did Lilian breathe of that hour. But next day, with a blanched lip and a shuddering heart, she confided what she had seen to her lover.

“ A warning, indeed, darling,” he said, sadly ; “ but you have not for a moment thought of it as aught but—but a symptom of Nature's decay. I have read of such cases. I never heard of one before, but there is no doubt you have seen the most terrible of the signs that consumption has nearly ended its work. Poor Amy's hours are numbered. I would that you, my own Lilian, had been spared such a sight—that you could be spared the rest.

"I will stay, dear Bernard," she said, "unless you desire it otherwise. Heaven keeps no teaching for us like that of the chamber of death."

CHAPTER LVI.

MORE DISCLOSURES.



T seemed as though an impulse, common in its object, though different in its origin, were bringing the various personages mentioned in our story to meet in the old house at this crisis. The Wilmslows, all save Henry, were dwellers there. Lilian Trevelyan was a guest, and Bernard Carlyon lingered. We have seen that Mrs. Forester, and her friend Heywood, were about to visit Lynfield; and the giant Shotton has hinted at the plans of another member of that faction, who was not likely to be far away when his schemes were in course of execution. But there were yet two other persons wanted to make up our company, and one of these was on his way, with important tidings. This was Stephen Molesworth.

He arrived at Aspen Court on the day on which Mrs. Forester and her companions were to leave London. He was received as an old friend by Jane Wilmslow, and he merely informed her that having been called down to Bristol by business, he would not omit the opportunity of visiting her. Had she heard from her husband? Not since his letter announcing his departure. And how was Amy? There was no need of other reply than that of the convulsive movement of the hand—the gesture that deprecated further converse on that sorrow.

"I know that I shall not be in your way, Mrs. Wilmslow," said Molesworth; "and as I must be in Bristol again in three days, it would be kind if you would let me remain here, in your fresh air, instead of spending the intermediate time in the dreariest place in the world. You will leave me calmly to my own resources. There is but one household care for you now."

And on these terms he remained. His first private interview was with Bernard Carlyon.

"So, Bernard," he said, taking the younger man's arm, and leading him up and down the old hall, "you came down to

console Mrs. Wilmslow, instead of writing to her? Perhaps that was the best way—the more letters one *speaks* the better, as a respected old grub in the Temple used to say.”

“I wrote, however,” said Carlyon, (who retained a curious impression of his last interview with Molesworth, and of the excitement then displayed by the latter,) “immediately after parting from you. I assured her of her own safe position, and of your continued regard.”

“But the letter was not sufficient, so you came down to confirm it?”

“No; I had quite another object in coming down.”

“May one ask it, Mr. Carlyon?”

“Certainly—it was to see a lady who is in this house.”

“Good boy. Then you have changed your mind, and taken my advice, and you intend to marry one of these little heiresses?”

“Assuredly not,” said Bernard. “When you did me the honour to inquire so very pointedly into my intentions, I told you, unhesitatingly, that they had nothing to do with the object you were so good as to propose. I have only to repeat that answer.”

Mr. Molesworth took his arm from Carlyon’s and retreated a step or two so as to face him.

“We are old friends, Bernard,” he said, in a voice much more gentle than was usual with him. “I have really no wish but for your good, and you might believe this, and not fence with an old man—old enough to be your father.”

“I have had no such idea,” said Carlyon, warmly. “But,” he added, “it is from yourself, Sir, that I have learned all the little caution I may have—and besides, I am sure you will allow that it is only very lately—very lately indeed, that you have been kind enough to show any of the feeling that makes one ready to confide.”

Molesworth looked at him earnestly, but did not reply, and Bernard felt compelled to go on.

“But I was about to explain, that the lady I spoke of is on a visit to Mrs. Wilmslow; her name is very familiar to you, as it was to me long before I met her—Miss Trevelyan.”

Mr. Molesworth broke out into a strange laugh.

“What? the other heiress? The dispossessed one? Come

back here, and established in the house of the conqueror ! And you, who so valiantly fought to turn her out—is her restoration your doing?"

"To a certain extent," said Bernard. "That is to say, she was so good as to take charge of the letter of which I spoke to you, and to come over and deliver it—the ladies have refused to part with her."

"And this lady—let us have no mistakes—is the successful rival of the Misses Wilmslow."

"It is hardly right to put it in that way," said Carlyon ; "but you now know the reason why I am not likely to intrude my attentions upon those young ladies."

"I should like to see her, Bernard," said Molesworth, in an odd, confidential tone, and with a quaint look.

"A pleasure which you may easily have, if you remain here."

"And yet I don't know that my seeing her is needful. I would rather take the evidence of your eyes and heart in such a matter than my own. Beautiful—amiable—accomplished—attached to you—all that may be taken *pro confesso*, I suppose."

"I am certain of the first three points," said Bernard, "and have some hope on the last."

"Come, no half confidences. Do I see an accepted lover?"

"I am proud and happy to say that it is so."

"That's the way to answer, Bernard."

"Possibly, Sir," said Bernard, good-humouredly ; "but I do not remember your being particularly anxious to inculcate that style of answer, in the old times."

"Open that big door for me, Bernard, will you be so good?—you are stronger than I am." And the great door being opened in accordance with his wish, he added, "Now leave me to myself, for a bit, but don't be out of the way when I come in again."

Stephen Molesworth walked up and down the lawn for so unreasonably long a time, that Carlyon's patience was exhausted, and he returned to the drawing-room, in the hope of finding Lillian. But in place of her he found Kate Wilmslow, whose manner to him had recovered its original cordiality—to outward appearance, at least—since Lillian's arrival.

Kate sprang up and hastened to meet him.

"I have been waiting to speak to you," she said, hurriedly. "That lawyer has not come for nothing, and you have been

talking to him in the hall. Is anything wrong? Tell me—not for my own sake, but for mamma's."

"Nothing," said Bernard; "he has been speaking to me entirely upon my own affairs."

"That is well," said Kate. "I do not know why, but the visit of every stranger gives me a fright lest bad news are coming. We have had so much trouble. O, Bernard, shall we ever forget that dreadful morning when the physician was here?"

"I need not say to you, dear Kate—"

"That you and he came in all kindness. No, no—mamma knows it, we all know it—poor Amy herself almost scolded us all round for not thanking you before you went away; but how could we?"

"How, indeed?" said Bernard, pressing her hand for a moment—had it been Emma's, he would, perhaps, have retained it for a second longer. "But one thing I never understood. How did your—how did Mr. Wilmslow discover that my friend was a medical man?"

"I am ashamed to tell you, but he explained it himself with triumph. Were not you and the other gentleman speaking about Amy in the hall?"

"Yes—but only in the low voice in which one would speak of such a matter. It is impossible that we could have been overheard."

"Do you remember where you stood, when talking?"

"Perfectly—near the curious old clock."

"Near the curtain. He was behind the curtain."

Lilian entered the room, with a little note in her hand, and came up to Bernard for advice, as naturally as if she had been all her life accustomed to seek his counsel. The note was a very polite one, from Mr. Molesworth, who requested the honour of a few minutes of private conversation with Miss Trevelyan, in any part of the house or grounds she might be pleased to appoint.

"Am I to meet him, dear?" was the simple question.

"Oh, by all means," said Bernard. "So he could not wait to be introduced to you, Lilian? An impatient old man. Oh, yes, you may safely hear what he has to say."

"But does he know—" said Lilian, looking up, with the prettiest mixture of blush and archness.

enough energy, "what right had you, Sir, to say anything to annoy Miss Trevelyan?"

"And *who* the devil—if you come to that," retorted Molesworth, looking rather amused; "or at least, who told you that the lady was annoyed? Govern your temper, Bernard."

"Well, Sir, now I do own that explanation is very necessary."

"Then, Sir, listen to me, and be good enough to recal sufficient of your professional habits to enable you to reserve your opinion till you have heard the whole case. This house and the estate of Aspen Court are, you are aware, mine—mine by absolute sale on the part of the Wilmslows. That you know? You may answer that question."

"I answer it, then, thus—that I have seen a statement to that effect, in a private paper, in your handwriting, which statement you have twice confirmed, verbally."

"And it may be true or not? Good. It happens to be true, and easily capable of proof. Now, having first, with your valuable aid (which I wish never to forget) fought for and won Aspen Court for the Wilmslows, and next, having purchased it of them, I chose, for reasons of my own, to allow them to hold and occupy it. With some of these reasons I need not trouble you, but one, perhaps the strongest, was my desire to make poor Mrs. Wilmslow as happy as her melancholy marriage would permit. I see that you have a rejoinder on your tongue."

"Only that this kindness was probably intended as some sort of compensation for that very marriage, chiefly brought about by yourself."

"It was so, young man," said Molesworth, sternly. "Years must pass over your head, and your character must deepen and harden, before I can speak to you on that marriage, with a hope of being understood. We will proceed with what is easier for you to understand. I say then, that I placed the Wilmslows here, intending them to remain, at all events, during the parents' lives. But Henry Wilmslow's conduct to his wife and children became, as you know, so infamous, that I was obliged to exert a power with which I had always kept myself provided, and to drive him from the country. Another sorrow, with which we can do nothing, has come upon Mrs. Wilmslow, and she is now, day by day, awaiting the death of her darling child. Do you think that some twenty years of suffering with her

"Certainly, dearest," said Bernard, "which gives you the right to call me in should his admiration grow troublesome."

"And where shall I see him, Kate dear? Tell me—you are at home?"

"And are not you, bad child?" said Kate. "Wait to be scolded for such a speech, that's all. Perhaps this room would be the best place. Shall I send word to Mr. Molesworth?"

The young lady was left to await the lawyer, who lost little time in obeying the summons. The interview was a very long one. When it was over, Mr. Molesworth, with his usual politeness, opened the door in the most courtly manner, to bow Miss Trevelyan from the room. She had evidently been in tears, but that they did not part bad friends might be inferred, from her pausing a moment to put her little hand into that of the old man, and from his pressing it—after the olden fashion—to his lips.

Bernard Carlyon next received a summons to the drawing-room, which he obeyed with much alacrity. Perhaps he was eager to know what his shrewd old ex-master thought of Lilian.

But it was not of Lilian that Molesworth began to speak, when Carlyon, in obedience to his gesture, had seated himself in a large armed chair, which in a manner imprisoned him, while the lawyer drew up opposite to him.

"Bernard," he said, "you became possessed of a certain secret of my office, and you have kept it as became an honourable man. You need not look haughty. I have no reason to suppose that I myself should have behaved as well as you have done. You might have turned that secret to account."

"I hope I should have kept it at least as faithfully, had I known its value. But as I did not, there is smaller merit, I suppose, in having been honest."

"If you had married one of these girls, here, as I advised you, and as Lord Rookbury advised you, its value would soon have been made pretty plain to you. Now I am in somewhat of a difficulty about my explanation."

"Is any explanation necessary?" said Bernard.

"Miss Trevelyan went out of this room, crying, just now, after hearing what I had to say, and then her lover asks me that?"

"And what the devil—or at least," said Carlyon, with quite

enough energy, "what right had you, Sir, to say anything to annoy Miss Trevelyan?"

"And *who* the devil—if you come to that," retorted Molesworth, looking rather amused; "or at least, who told you that the lady was annoyed? Govern your temper, Bernard."

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scoundrel husband, years of grief, shame, poverty, and insult, crowned by this coming blow, form a sufficient penance for Jane Wilmslow?"

"Does such a question need answer?"

"You think that the poor lady has suffered enough?"

"Enough! But that we know that those who have been wronged here will be righted elsewhere, that woman's life were an atheist's apology."

"Most true. Now—are *you* prepared to add to her miseries?"

"I! Ask her whether she believes she has a more devoted friend?"

"Her devoted friend has not yet been tried."

"Put him to the trial," said Bernard, calmly.

"Will you expel Mrs. Wilmslow from Aspen Court?"

"Your character, Mr. Molesworth, is a guarantee that you do not talk idly. That is the only answer I can give to a question apparently so insane."

But supposing that I removed all the insanity, and showed you that the question was perfectly rational, and that you had the power to drive away this lady from the house in which we are."

"Is it necessary for me—what is the use of my replying that I should receive such a proposition with indignation?"

"Not much, until you know how it could be put to you. You look contemptuously, which is not well. You know me, and as you have justly said, I never talk idly. Hear my determination. I have resolved to give Aspen Court a new mistress. I have also resolved that such mistress shall be no other lady than your wife."

"Than my wife!"

"Precisely—than Mrs. Bernard Carlyon,—in due time, no doubt, and if red tape holds its own, to be Lady Carlyon, and ultimately—who knows? Lady St. Aspen's, perhaps."

"And the lady's present name?" said Carlyon, with some agitation.

"That depends upon yourself, not me. Choose between one of two, and poor Mrs. Wilmslow retains her home here, which she will not do if you choose a third."

"In other words——"

"In other words—marry either Emma or Kate Wilmslow,

and their mother need not be driven out. Marry any other lady, and even if she be willing that a stranger should occupy her house, Jane Wilmslow will not accept a home on sufferance from her."

"But," said Carlyon, bewildered, "what am I in this—what is my wife—why—*this* is what I ask? You speak of your will, and of your power, and of your making my wife the mistress of this place. Rejecting, as of course I do, all your preposterous endowments, what next? You may drive out poor Mrs. Wilmslow, but what part or lot have I or my wife in the matter?"

"Your wife, I imagine," said Molesworth slowly, "will obey *you*."

"I trust so—in this, as in all such matters," said Bernard, promptly.

"And you will obey *me*."

"I—what obedience do I owe you—are you jesting? Why should I obey you?"

"Because, Bernard, you are my only son."

CHAPTER LVII.

IT IS DONE.



CARLYON'S first sensation of astonishment had hardly subsided into that calmer condition of mind which permits question and takes in the meaning of reply, when Mrs. Wilmslow entered the apartment. Bernard's face was averted, but she read in that of Molesworth that a passionate interview had taken place.

"Lilian has been with me," she said. "I suppose that what has been revealed to her has not been kept secret here."

"Did you know of this—of this relationship, dear Mrs. Wilmslow?" said Bernard, who struggled between a strange desire to give way to his agitated feelings, and a repugnance to utter them to the man who had made the revelation—the stern, hard man who had for years been his master, and now announced himself as his father. If Molesworth would have quitted the room, and left Bernard to the sympathies of the gentle woman before him, such relief would, he felt, have been most welcome.

"I must not say that I knew it, dear Bernard," said Jane,

in her kindest voice, "but the news has perhaps surprised me less than others. Do you not know that a mother's eye notices much that other eyes pass over?"

"Yet I thought my secret well kept," said Molesworth. "Bernard will hardly say that paternal indulgence would have helped him to the discovery."

"Bernard is hardly in the condition to say anything at this moment," said Jane. "If he will take my advice, and be alone for an hour or two, especially as I much wish to speak to you——"

Carlyon thanked her with a glance, then, after a moment's hesitation, took the proffered hand of Molesworth, pressed it respectfully, and hastened from the room.

He wandered among the Aspen woods, long and long after the time Mrs. Wilmslow had suggested for his retirement had passed. As usual, a mixture of feelings strove and struggled for the mastery within him, but a certain satisfaction was at first predominant. Seeking to throw back his recollection, in order to trace Molesworth's course in regard to himself, Bernard could recall little that connected him with the lawyer, with whom, nevertheless, he seemed to have had an acquaintance long before their professional relationship began. A firm of country bankers had supplied to Carlyon the place of parents, to the extent of first entrusting the child to kindly but hired guardianship, and then seeing the boy, and afterwards the youth, through two or three schools, each suited to his age, and all of first-rate character. Holiday visits to one or other of the partners were cheerful, though rare seasons for Bernard, and it was during these country sojournings that he acquired the vigour, and the love of outdoor sports, which we have seen stand him in good stead. To the youth's natural inquiries respecting his relatives, one stereotype reply was always ready,—his parents had been West Indians, and had died shortly after "remitting" him to England. So very little more than this arid answer could he ever procure, that at length he accepted it as the basis of his personal history, and ceased to ask further. Messrs. Lutcombe, Biggs & Elvaston, to whose care he was supposed to have been confided, duly paid his school and other bills, and in due time articulated him to their old London friend, Mr. Molesworth, who *had taken a stern liking to the young Bernard.* A small allow-

ance, which was to cease with his twenty-fifth year, had been regularly paid to him—the wreck, it was hinted, of some West Indian property—and this was all that Bernard Carlyon had owed to any real or imaginary parentage.

He had made his own way in life, and no unfavourable destiny seemed before him. His first train of reflections, as he strayed through the Aspen woods, brought him to the conclusion that his position was much improved by the revelation of which we have heard. His second thoughts were of his newly-found father, and of his character, and of the affections which should have subsisted between them. The romantic mind will condemn him, and charge him with heartlessness and apathy in not making this after-thought his first consideration. Doubtless it had been more graceful and far more touching, had the young man been described as hungering and thirsting for a father's love, and as giving way to all the pent-up affection of five-and-twenty years, when the magic word was pronounced. But, time-honoured as is the fiction which converts utter strangeness into the holiest affection by the enunciation of two syllables, it is to be feared that it will scarcely bear a test. I fear that the habit of loving is a habit which those who would love, and be loved, must cultivate; and that those who desire—not merely offspring, but children, must keep those creatures within sound of the voice and within beat of the heart.

Occupied with his meditations, and though naturally disturbed by what he had learned, not discouraged, Bernard forgot the hours, and nearly all things, save his own novel position. His engagement to Lilian mingled with every tangled thought, and with this he connected the strange conversation with which Mr. Molesworth had led up to the announcement of that day. Bernard may be pardoned,—for it was at once late and early for him to refer his own actions to the standard of filial duty,—for determining to resist, as far as he could, any scheme of Molesworth's which involved the disturbance of poor Jane Wilmslow in her home. But he could not divest himself of the idea, that the proposition was but a device of his father's for testing his character; and he promised himself the satisfaction of proving to Mr. Molesworth, that a resolute will was hereditary in the race for which Bernard had been so recently claimed.

Suddenly—and it was a wonder that, coming like a flash of

lightning, the thought had not come sooner—a new idea darted upon his mind, and fixed itself mercilessly. Bernard, who had been lying on the sward, among the old trees, sprang to his feet with his brow in a glow. It had not occurred to him to ask the question—even of himself—but now it seemed as if thundered to him a world of voices. His mother! Mr. Molesworth was married—had daughters—and the eldest, as Carlyon had had various reasons of business for knowing, had been born within the first year of the union. This was a second marriage, then, or—

Hurrying back to the house, that this appalling doubt might instantly be satisfied, he scarcely noticed—though he did certainly see—that a travelling carriage, which had just left the mansion, was emerging upon the road. Bernard saw that the postilions drove rapidly away, but gave no second thought to the subject. He hastily traversed the rooms in search of Molesworth, but was unable to find him, and at length was informed by a servant that he had walked out with Mrs. Wilmslow upwards of an hour before. The clock apprised Bernard that he had been absent four or five hours.

Where were the young ladies—where was Miss Trevelyan?

The young ladies were in Miss Amy's room—the other young lady was gone away.

"Gone away! What trash—what infernal nonsense! Call down one of the Miss Wilmslows. Gone away—what an atrocious fool the woman must be to talk such madness!"

Kate's light limbs brought her into his presence almost with a wish.

"Oh, Bernard—we have searched for you in every corner of the place; Emma, myself, the servants, all of us. Lilian was so unhappy at going without seeing you, but they could wait no longer—it was a case of life and death."

"Going! where?—who?—for heaven's sake—whose life and death?—my dearest child, speak."

"Her uncle, Mr. Eustace Trevelyan—he is dying. A lady, I believe she said the Superior of a convent, came with another lady to fetch her—a beautiful person—and Lilian went off with them, leaving all sorts of kind messages for you—but it is no use delivering them, for you are not listening. My good gracious, Bernard, how white you are! You are ill!"

"No, no, quite well," said Carlyon in a low voice. "Tell me—how long have they been gone? Ah! I saw a carriage—was that——"

"They have not been gone ten minutes—a quarter of an hour, at the outside."

"No one with them but ladies?"

"One servant behind, the most savage-looking servant I ever saw. I suppose he is the guard to the convent. The tone in which he asked Martha the way to the stables quite petrified the poor girl."

"Thanks—thanks."

Bernard rushed from the house and round to the stables. The horse which he had brought over from Lynfield was still there. To bridle and saddle him, in Carlyon's excited state, perhaps took him a few minutes longer than it would have done had he been perfectly calm; but it was speedily effected, and Bernard took the rein to lead the animal into the yard. As he did so, the horse looked at him wistfully, and at the third step stumbled, and uttered a sound of pain. Carlyon's eye instantly detected the cause. A small stream of blood was flowing from one of the legs of the poor animal. It had evidently been wounded, in order to disable it, and the cruel device had succeeded—the horse was dead lame. Bernard, convinced that the case was hopeless, flung the rein from him, and the poor creature limped back, painfully, to its stall. What doubt had lingered in his mind as to the character of those by whom Lilian had been carried off was now dispelled, by the evidence of the act which had left him powerless to pursue.

CHAPTER LVIII.

ELEPHANT AND TIGER.



ANOTHER minute, and Bernard might have been seen making his way over fields and through hedges, and in crow-flight line for the little village, which, as has been said, lay about half a mile from the house. But it was rather in the chance, than in the hope, of obtaining the means of pursuit that he hurried thither, and he could scarcely be said to be disappointed, how-

ever incensed, at finding nothing that would answer his purpose. There were three or four farm-houses within no great distance, and their owners would gladly have mounted the friend of Lord Rookbury, little as they might care for the guest of Wilmslow of Aspen. As he paused to determine which to try, there rattled out upon the road from a small side lane the smallest chaise, with the smallest and wickedest-looking pony that ever united for the conveyance of human beings. In this vehicle, and dressed in a huge hairy coat, and wearing a hat that must have weighed some pounds, sat a large man, whose figure seemed perfectly gigantic upon such a frail pedestal. But that conveyance Bernard instantly resolved to secure, and he at once hailed the burly driver, who indeed had begun to check his restless little horse the moment he got upon the high road.

"All right, Sir. Up with you, Sir. No offence, Sir, but time's called."

"Shotton!"

Bernard lost a few seconds in obtaining what was left of the seat in the little chaise. There was, more, however, than he expected to find—the seat of this vehicle had evidently been constructed on the idea that the owner might have friends of his own size.

"This is lucky," said Bernard, as the pony struck out and rattled them away.

"Taint luck, Sir; no offence. I've been prowling about these parts ever since the other night, and I've not been quite in the dark as to the dodge as is up. You know about the carriage, Sir?"

"Yes," said Bernard, "and now to overtake it. That's the first business. They struck into the road yonder, and we can hardly miss them; but the start is a long one—seven or eight miles, at the rate they would go."

"That's so, Sir," said Shotton, quietly; the pony hurrying on in high spirits, and as if unconscious of the formidable weight behind.

"The post-horses are not good, but I shouldn't wonder if orders had been sent down the road to get the best and have them ready."

"That's so, Sir."

"Eh! You know something about the place, Shotton?"

"That's so, Sir, too. But if it ud answer your wish not to ask me no more questions, but only to tell me what you would like, I'd be werry glad." He looked round, or rather down upon his companion, with a sort of helpless look, which might imply that the other could extract from him whatever he pleased, and that the best plan was to request his forbearance.

"I'll ask you nothing," said Carlyon, "except to bring me up with that accursed carriage, and then stop it by driving across the road and under the leaders' heads."

"That way might do, too," said Mr. Shotton, with some admiration. "But we'll stop 'em, and no broken knees to plaster."

"Broken knees!" said Bernard. "Fancy, Shotton, the scoundrelly servant in that carriage running round to the stables up there, and stabbing my horse in the leg to prevent my following."

"Was that done, Sir?"

"Done, yes. The poor brute couldn't limp across the yard."

"That wornt the servant, Sir," said Shotton, with animation. "The servant in that carriage wouldn't have done no such thing. May be he'd have pitched saddles and bridles down the well, or even guv a drug or some such lark to stop you; but Duffing Billy ain't the cove to use a knife, leastways on a dumb animal. Why, I've seed him sow a dog after a fight, and handle him like a bit of wax: dog never so much as whine."

"Then it was somebody else, Shotton, that's all; and whoever he is, I wish either you or I may get within reach of him."

"That we'll do, Sir, before long, I fancy." And truly, at the rate at which the little horse clattered along, it did seem probable. The well-hung chaise quivered and swayed as they hurried past gate, hedge, or stile; and sometimes the seat dipped like the card of a compass, when they took a corner much too sharply. Still they had much lost ground and time to make up, and the darkness was coming on.

"I trust we shall sight them before it grows quite dark," said Carlyon uneasily.

"No odds, Sir."

"How do you mean?"

"Lights is hung out at night, I've heard, Sir."

"Perhaps they won't light their lamps."

"Somebody may for 'em, perhaps, Sir," said Shotton, with a look which convinced Carlyon that he knew more than he chose to tell.

The night came on more densely, and still the good little horse held gallantly on—one walk over a stubborn hill, and one halt to have his mouth wiped out, being the only occasions on which he had slackened. He clattered away, and the sparks jumped brightly from his feet into the darkening road. The night promised to be a gloomy one. Bernard's excitement became painful, the more so as that they were approaching a point at which three roads met; and uncertainty in a chase is a cruel sensation. As they neared the point in question he said to his companion:—

"They are on one of these roads—but which?"

"Leave it to the pony, Sir," said Shotton. But he evidently was not leaving it to the pony, who had an inclination for the road to the left, whereas Shotton's strong right arm was influencing him, unmistakably, the other way. Carlyon saw the action, and felt somewhat reassured. They plunged into the new road; and the little horse, having given up his own fancy, rattled on as good-humouredly as before.

Shortly afterwards, they reached an inn, which was also a posting station, a little way in the rear of a small town, to which a railway branch has now extended; and the posting-house has been converted into a school, conducted on a plan of newfangled pedantry, and turns out asses instead of horses. This they drove past, but Carlyon noticed that the pony slackened a little in his speed, whether from fatigue, or at the driver's will, he could not discover. But he inclined to the latter opinion, because, as soon as they had well passed the inn, and some neighbouring houses, the animal sprang forward again at his old pace.

"They changed there, Shotton."

"Begging pardon, Sir, they did not. Change at the next, over the hill."

"I must not ask you how you know."

"Some folks is obliged to look sharp, Sir, when beaks is out, and so we get to know a nod from a wink, not being blind horses. I'm thinking the ostler at that house is a careless dog, Sir. Did you notice as he'd stuck up a pitchfork on that heap

oppersite, and left his Sunday hat sticking on it. I think I heard him opening the door, after we had passed, and mayhap he's going to take his hat down again, for fear he shouldn't find it when he wants to go to church."

Bernard made no reply: for the certainty that he was about to come up with the object of their pursuit, unfitted him for any conversation. About three miles more were got over, and the pony began to give evident signs of flagging.

"Groggy, eh, my lad," said Shotton. "Well, you've gone in like a game 'un, and no mistake, but there's work in you yet."

A long steep hill was before them, and the two men got out to walk up it—a measure not only of mercy, but of economy as regarded the failing strength of the animal. It was a tug and a toil; and when they reached the top, and resumed their seats, it was clear that the horse had been overtaken, and that in descending the hill his legs were by no means safe under him.

"Now, Sir, you see where *he* is. The sponge must be thrown up precious soon, but the whip 'll bring him up for a round or two more." And he was about to apply that stimulant, when, at some distance before them, a single bright light appeared in the centre of the road. It was evidently a small lamp hanging very near the ground, and as it swung it enabled Bernard to make out that it was just between the hind-wheels of a carriage.

"Him's them," said Mr. Shotton. "Thank ye, Mr. Duffing Billy, for your polite lantern. Take it easy, pony my lad, or you might frighten the gentry." And the whip was returned to its place.

"Cheap and easy, till they pulls up for the change—that won't be hurried, as I happen to know, Sir—and then go in for mischief."

"Right," said Bernard, almost in a tremble with angry anticipation of the coming scene.

They therefore proceeded at a gentler pace, (for the post-horses, which had come a long stage, were not rapid,) and took care to be sufficiently distant to prevent the smart clatter of the pony's feet from being audible. So they went on for a time which seemed an age to the impatient Bernard; and then the lamp, which had been pendant thus far, was drawn up and disappeared.

"Close to the place, Sir," whispered Shotton, as if the carriage people could have overheard him.

A few yards further he brought the pony to a stand-still. The carriage went on for some minutes, and then stopped at a roadside inn. The darkness was complete, but three or four lanterns speedily appeared; and from the point at which Carlyon and his companion had pulled up, which was somewhat higher than the ground on which the inn stood, they could see the postilions dismounting, and the disengaging of the weary horses from the carriage. They could also make out that there had been two men in the rumble, and a third, who had apparently come from the inn, seemed to be directing the movements of the party.

"Now, Sir," said the boxer, "if you're game, hit out."

"Go," said Carlyon, in a fierce voice.

The startled pony, roused by a slash from Shotton's whip, sprang violently forward, and, urged by stroke and shout, dashed down the slope at headlong pace. A few seconds brought the chaise up to the group around the carriage, (now without horses,) and several yards past it, and nothing but the gigantic strength of the boxer could have checked the now exasperated animal, and enabled Bernard to spring to the ground. In another minute Carlyon was in the centre of the group. A scowling, hard-faced, well-dressed man had descended from the rumble, and was receiving instructions from a taller person, who kept in the rear of the carriage. A simultaneous gesture brought both their faces into light, and Bernard instantly recognised Mr. Mardyke and Cyprian Heywood. They had not, as it seemed, noticed him in the darkness, and amid the confusion of a change of horses, and he hastily turned, and went round to the other door of the carriage, which he opened. There were ladies inside; and the face—a beautiful one—which suddenly turned upon him was that of Mrs. Forester.

"Heavens! Mr. Carlyon! Ruined—ruined!" she exclaimed.

"I will not stop to congratulate you on your occupation, Mrs. Forester," said Bernard, scornfully. "Lilian, it is you whom I want."

"Hush! hush! for God's sake," said Mrs. Forester, clenching his arm tightly; "you know not what madness you are committing."

"I know all," said Carlyon. "Lilian, come out, and be rescued from an infamous conspiracy."

"O mercy! Be silent," implored Mrs. Forester, clasping her hands. "Speak to him."

A second lady bent forward. She wore a cloak of white fur, and a thick veil. Raising this, she disclosed, not the features he expected to see, but those of Mary Maynard.

"Pray be silent, and keep out of sight," said Mary. "I know all you would say. All is well, if you will leave it so."

"Are you mad," said Bernard, "or am I? Where is Miss Trevelyan? You deluded her from Aspen Court this day, and I have traced you hither. Where is she? Do you think I am to be duped by your treachery? Where is she?"

"My God!" said Mrs. Forester, "this, which we did not foresee, will ruin us all."

"And rightly," returned Bernard. "Once more, where is Lilian?"

"Lilian is safe," said Mrs. Forester, in a low voice of intense earnestness; "but you will destroy us."

"Safe! Where? With whom? You took her from Aspen Court, and I demand her at your hands."

"Bernard," said Mary, "we are not deceiving you. There was a plot to carry her off, but— Ah! all is lost," she exclaimed, sinking back into the corner of the carriage, as Mardyke, who had observed that a stranger was at its door, came round and confronted him.

"Now, Sir," said Mardyke, in a rough, bullying voice, "how dare you open that carriage door? Do you know the ladies inside?"

"I know you, you scoundrel," retorted Carlyon, "and I have an account to settle with you. But other things first. Keep your distance, rascal," he added, as Mardyke approached to thrust him from the carriage door, "or I settle it on the instant. Mrs. Forester, it is painful to me to speak harshly to you, but I must be answered—where is Miss Trevelyan?"

"Here is Miss Trevelyan, Mr. Carlyon," she said, in a calm tone, but looking into his face with eyes of earnest meaning. "Here is Miss Trevelyan," she repeated, signing towards Mary Maynard. "Surely, Mr. Mardyke, there need be no angry

words, because Mr. Carlyon, whom we knew in town, recognises two friends."

"No man has any right to open the door of a carriage under my charge," blustered Mr. Mardyke.

"Even were your errand different, Mrs. Forester, I should regret to see you accompanied by such a person as this," said Bernard. "The man is a low apothecary, who has been hired by the Jesuit, Heywood, to assist in an atrocious plot, and who this day had the brutality to wound my horse, lest I should pursue him."

Mardyke looked savagely at Bernard, and then rushed round to the front of the carriage, to which no horses had yet been attached, and began to storm and bluster at the ostlers, who seemed to be purposely delaying their preparations.

"Oh, Mr. Carlyon," said both the women at once, "go away, go away!"

"Without a clue?" angrily asked Bernard, who had been prepared for an indignant display, but who could not but feel that Mrs. Forester and Mary were trembling with real agitation.

"Listen," said Mrs. Forester, bending down to him; her eyes swimming in tears; "we were obliged to bring away Miss Trevelyan, because else——"

"He here!" exclaimed a well-known voice, some paces behind.

Mrs. Forester uttered a low cry as Heywood strode forward, followed by Mardyke, who had apprised him of Bernard's arrival.

"Affect to believe that this is Lilian, and we may be saved yet," hissed out Mrs. Forester, in a tone that reached Bernard's ear.

It was fatal counsel for one of that group.

"So, Mr. Bernard Carlyon," exclaimed the priest, who had discarded his ordinary garb, and looked even more than usually noble in a half military undress which he had assumed. "So, Sir, true to the last to your united trades—pertinacious as an attorney, insolent as an official."

"I talked to you while you were a gentleman—now that you are a subject for the police, forgive my silence, Mr. Heywood." And he half turned from him.

"Take a warning—a last warning—young man. You have crossed my path several times, and I have treated you with the

forbearance we extend to inferior creatures. But all that is over," he added, fiercely: "and now, abandon your folly, and take yourself from my presence. The business on which I am engaged is not to be hindered by your miserable opposition—begone, therefore, or your chastisement will be more severe than you imagine."

"Knowing me so well, you talk such trash to me?" returned Carlyon.

"It is because I know him so well, that I talk so," said Heywood, turning to Mardyke, with that strange expression of cunning once more manifest in his countenance.

"Do not wake her," said Mrs. Forester, earnestly. "This noise——"

"True, true," said Heywood, in a voice of sudden and singular tenderness. "She shall not be waked until she wakes with these arms around her. Do you know that Lilian Trevelyan is in that carriage, Bernard Carlyon, and that we are leaving England together for ever?"

"I will speak with that lady, nevertheless," said Carlyon, "for there is one question which I must ask of her."

"Take the answer from me, and begone, I tell you. You would know whether she goes of her own free-will, and consciously. I tell you, No. She has been beguiled into that carriage, and sleeps under the influence of a drug compounded for her by my friend Mardyke, wisest of physicians. You have your answer—begone." And Cyprian Heywood flung his hands wildly upon the air.

"It is indeed well that I followed you," said Bernard.

"Yes, if you take my warning, and begone; else it may not be so well."

"I repeat that I must speak to that lady," said Bernard, who had but one thought, which was for the real Lilian. And he advanced once more to the door of the carriage.

"His own folly. Down with him!" cried Cyprian Heywood, in a voice at once unnaturally high and harsh.

"That's your man," said Mardyke, speaking to a rough-looking person, in a handsome blue great coat, and with a servant's hat, for whom Mardyke seemed to make way. "Fell him."

"A word about that, master," said the other. "They say, a

word and a blow, and a blow to come first, but by your leave, we'll alter that quite easily for once."

"Do your work," said Mardyke, fiercely.

"Sertingly," said the other; "but when others does it for me, and does it in a way which I can noways approve of, things is altered. My eyes has been opened, and I must know somefin more. Was it you as goes a stabbin horses in the legs, and making believe it was me? That's what I'm led to believe, fellow-servant. How about that, eh?"

"What is that chattering?" demanded Heywood, fiercely. "Mr. Mardyke, is this the way you manage your tools?"

Bernard had availed himself of this colloquy to get near the carriage, and to hear from Mrs. Forester a few words, which at once removed the weight from his heart. It was almost with a smile that he again confronted Heywood, who, stung into rage by the unlooked-for disobedience of his vassal, seized Bernard violently by the collar, and sought to fling him under the wheel of the carriage. The sudden attack might have succeeded, for all Heywood's great personal strength was put forth, and his slighter antagonist was taken at a disadvantage, when the priest's arm was struck from below, and he was compelled to relinquish his hold. Shotton, who had hung about until needed, now interposed, and having thus disengaged Bernard from his enemy, paused, as an elephant might have done under similar circumstances.

But Heywood's mad blood was now up, and the wounded tiger could hardly have flung himself more recklessly upon that same elephant, than Heywood rushed upon the boxer, striking savagely, and with all his might. The trained strength of Shotton, and his professional self-command, easily held the assailant at bay, while his attack was made with the weapons with which nature supplies her children, and the boxer even found time to remonstrate with his antagonist, and to adjure him, with strange but well-meant imprecations, not to maintain so unequal a conflict. But Heywood's frenzy now broke out beyond bounds, and, enraged at being thus baffled, he suddenly turned aside, and snatched from the hand of Mardyke a heavy and knotted walking-stick—a bludgeon which it was that physician's habit to carry—and swinging this round, he dashed a fierce and downright blow at the head of Shotton. Even that

bull-head would have crashed under the stroke, had it descended fairly, but the left arm flew to its guard, and received the weight—nor was it in human nature that man or gladiator should withhold an answering blow. The next instant the noble form of Cyprian Heywood lay senseless at the foot of his enemy.

"You have killed him! you have killed him!" shrieked Mary Maynard, rushing from the carriage, "you have killed the only man worth living for in the world." And she threw herself on her knees, and sought to raise the prostrate Heywood, Bernard assisting her in the task.

"He is not killed, my lady, no such luck," said Shotton; "and if that doctor would only come here and look at him, he'd be all right."

But the purposed operation was not so easy, for Mardyke, in his exasperation at the disobedience of the man in the blue coat, had laid a hand on him, to urge him to the execution of his task, and this indignity Duffing Billy had resented by a couple of what he termed "taps" in Mardyke's face, but which had for the time blinded him, and otherwise rendered him an unseemly spectacle.

"He is only stunned," said Carlyon; "he will soon recover. Let us remove him into the house."

Miss Maynard sprang from the ground, and hastened to Mrs. Forester, who had left the carriage, and they exchanged a few energetic words.

"That will be best," said Mrs. Forester. "Mr. Mardyke, come this way, if you please."

The haughty tone of the lady brought Mardyke to her side, though with a very bad grace, for he was pressing his hands over his damaged features, and was evidently in a semi-bewildered state.

"Mr. Mardyke," said Lucy Forester, in her clear, commanding voice, "I am sorry that our intended frolic has ended unfortunately. You are of course aware that Miss Trevelyan was left in safety at Wingledew, where we stopped, and where Miss Maynard was so unwell that we were obliged to take her into the house. Oh, you thought it was Miss Maynard that had been left?—very naturally, as she had borrowed Miss Trevelyan's cloak, and the young ladies had changed bonnets. It was, however, Miss Trevelyan. Strange, that you should have

been mistaken all the rest of the way. Perhaps, Mr. Heywood, poor man, who had been waiting for us here, was mistaken also. However, all is explained, and the best—and safest—plan will be for the original idea to be carried out.”

“But,” mumbled Mr. Mardyke, for the state of his mouth prevented his speaking with any clearness, “Mr. Heywood was going——”

“Was going to embark at Bristol with his ward. Miss Maynard is his ward. Will you charge yourself with seeing that they are safely placed on board? As Mr. Heywood will probably be too ill to know exactly what is going on, it is the more necessary that a kind friend should superintend his embarkation. Do you understand, Mr. Mardyke? *This* is a very harmless conspiracy.”

Mardyke gave a sullen assent, and bending over Heywood, whose head was supported on Bernard’s knee, he intimated that if the priest were placed in the carriage, he would be answerable for his medical treatment.

Cyprian Heywood was therefore carefully raised and deposited in the vehicle, and Mardyke got in beside him, rejoiced at escaping any further intercourse with his pretended fellow-servant and castigator.

“God bless you, Lucy,” said Mary Maynard. “If he does not kill me when he comprehends it all, some day he shall love me.”

“And God bless you, dear Mary; you deserve better things than have ever yet fallen to your share. I wish I had been kinder to you.”

“Do you?” said Mary, kissing her passionately; “that was all I wanted you to say. Farewell, Bernard. Lilian has forgiven me that kiss after what I have done for her to-day. Farewell, all of you.”

Away went the carriage. The plan, into which that of the priest had been transformed by female ingenuity, was carried out. Heywood, partially recovered, but still unable to speak coherently, was duly placed in his berth, and that which he had intended for Lilian was occupied by Mary Maynard, who tended him with unceasing solicitude. The steamer left the Severn that night, bearing away to a home in the New World a hapless priest and a reckless maiden.

Let us finish the narrative of their fortunes ; the record is very brief. A year later, Mrs. Forester, then Lady Selwyn, received from Mrs. Heywood a packet containing the documents with whose production Cyprian had threatened her. The note accompanying them merely said :—

“In return for your parting wish. I am very happy, and we are going to be Mormons.

“M. H.”

CHAPTER LIX.

OUR “VINEYARD.”

THE party at the posting-house was now reduced to a small number, Mrs. Forester, Bernard Carlyon, and the boxer, composing the assemblage. It was now night, and Carlyon was restless until Lilian should be restored to Aspen Court. Such quaint conveyance as the house could furnish was procured, and Mrs. Forester and Bernard set off. The boxer, for his good service, and likewise for his arm, injured by Heywood's blow, was offered a seat on the box ; but he preferred to stay, and take charge of his valiant little horse. He promised, however, not to lose sight of Carlyon.

While re-traversing the ground over which he had hurried in so much excitement, Bernard addressed but few words to his beautiful companion, whose conduct in the affair he could not quite comprehend. But he resolved, after deliberation, to accept the story as explained by Mrs. Forester to Mr. Mardyke, and which circumstances appeared to bear out. He therefore requested that Mrs. Forester, who had brought away Miss Trevelyan from Aspen Court, would herself restore that young lady to the house, and thus qualify herself to answer any possible observations which might be made on the subject of that night's expedition.

Mrs. Forester's natural *hauteur* somewhat revolted against this proposal, fair and reasonable as it was, and with more of a fine-lady air than was necessary under the circumstances, she said something about Lilian being a very interesting girl, whose

acquaintance she should be happy to improve, but that her own immediate return to town was necessary.

"Of course, as you please," said Bernard. "I will tell them where to stop, so that you may get across to the railway. By the way, I mean to have revenge on that Mr. Mardyke for his cruelty to my poor horse. I wonder what is the best way to get at him. I must call on Mr. Selwyn, and ask him ; he has been Home Secretary, and knows the best way of doing everything."

"You know, Mr. Carlyon," said Mrs. Forester, in her pleasantest way, and after a short pause, "that if you think Miss Trevelyan herself would wish me to go back with her to Aspen Park—Court—what is it?—I shall be delighted to do so. She is so dear a creature that I have quite learned to love her, and I am not quick, you know, at giving my love or hate."

"I think that it would gratify her much," said Bernard, who also perceived, of course, that his wife had one enemy, at least, for the rest of her life.

"Then let us go to Wingledew the shortest way, by all means. By the way," she added, "it is not for a woman to give counsel to you statesmen ; but perhaps in social matters we may have a little more discretion than yourselves. That wicked, cruel man ought to be punished, and yet, as the story cannot come out in fragments, and all our names must be involved, I think—what do you say—that the poor horse had better be unavenged ?"

"Perhaps you are right ; I am sure you are ; you are always right. I shall say nothing about it."

"A charming girl she is, that Lilian of yours, Bernard ; I cannot help thinking of her eyes. I suppose, when you are married, you will have her presented. Don't ask me to do it merely because I mentioned it, but it would give me sincere pleasure to present so lovely a creature."

"There is only one other name that I could possibly prefer to see in connexion with my wife's," said Bernard.

"And whose is that ?"

"You will be angry."

"No, you have some right to annoy me ; besides, you won't ?"

"Well, then,—Mrs. Francis Selwyn's."

"Ah !"

"Do you know that he is to be made a baronet ?"

"This is Wingle dew," said Mrs. Forester, laughing.

But on inquiring at the pretty little country inn where Lilian had been deposited, and where, indeed, the change of costume had been effected in order to deceive Mardyke, they found that "the young lady was gone."

Twice that day had Bernard heard these odious words in reference to the same object, and it was with no sweetness of manner or tone that he repeated them now to his companion.

Mrs. Forester either was, or affected to be, much in earnest in her remorse, and her cross-examination of the landlady of the pretty little inn was most eager and indignant. The arrangement with the young lady had been, that she was to occupy her own apartment until a carriage should arrive to take her to Aspen Court. The landlady was perfectly aware of that, and the carriage *had* arrived, with two gentlemen in it, and had taken the young lady away.

"This is not the sequel to your plot, Mrs. Forester?" asked Bernard, in indignant agitation.

"I swear to you that it is not. Our intention had been to order a chaise from the place at which you overtook us, and to send it back for Miss Trevelyan, as they have no conveyance here. The man in the servant's dress was to have made an excuse for going back a few minutes after we had left that inn, and ordering the chaise. Mary had given him money for the purpose. For Heaven's sake, don't make things worse than they are by unjust suspicions!"

"Two gentlemen!—did you notice them? you must have done so," said Bernard to the hostess.

"Only a little, Sir," said the woman, kindly, for she perceived Bernard's emotion, and instinctively set it down to the right account. "One did not get out; the other spoke to the young lady for a minute or two, and then handed her into the carriage."

"But he must have taken his hat off when he came into the house. What was he like? What aged man?"

"He did not come into the house, Sir. It was quite light, and the young lady preferred to walk in the garden to sitting up-stairs, so they saw her at once, and the gentleman stopped the carriage by them stacks, and got out and handed her in. She seemed to know him, and she went away quite quiet like,

for she nodded and smiled at me, as much as to say, Good night to you."

"There is only one thing to do, Bernard," said Mrs. Forester, "and that is to drive to Aspen Court as fast as we can. I shall be miserable until we find Lilian, but I think we shall find her there."

They found her, and also that her companions had been Mr. Molesworth and the Earl of Rookbury, the latter of whom had met Molesworth and Mrs. Wilmslow returning from their walk, and had asked the lawyer to drive with him, Jane releasing him, having errands of her own in the village. They had seen Lilian walking in the garden, and Molesworth, whose thoughts were upon her interview with him that morning, immediately recognised her. Lilian had not been made aware of the real nature of Heywood's plot, Mrs. Forester considerably under-colouring it, in the hasty explanation which sufficed to induce Lilian but too gladly to withdraw from the party at Wingledew, leaving Miss Maynard to take her place. Miss Trevelyan, therefore, more speedily recovered from the excitement and agitation of the scene than she would have done had she understood her full danger and her escape. Naturally, on seeing Lord Rookbury's carriage, she imagined that it had been sent for herself, and hastening to meet it, and finding her new friend, Mr. Molesworth, Lilian was confirmed in this impression. His surprise at meeting at the little country inn the young lady whom he had left at some miles' distance, of course produced reciprocal surprise on her part. However, at Lord Rookbury's most courteously urged entreaty, Miss Trevelyan accepted this new escort to Aspen Court, and, moreover, had the prudence and presence of mind to tell Mr. Molesworth that the reason of his finding her at Wingledew was a little secret, which somebody else should explain to him by-and-by. What a treasure of a girl was our blue-eyed Lilian! What a number of black-eyed girls, and blue-eyed ones also, would on no account have lost this chance of heroineship. Lilian, on the contrary, resolved to conceal her adventure until sure that she should be doing kindly and wisely by telling it.

But there were other things to tell at Aspen Court that night. Mrs. Forester, on being informed that Lilian was safe, was so earnest in her expression of desire not to alight, but to be taken

on to the railway station, that Carlyon would not press her to enter a house where her position would be equivocal, to say the least of it. And she squeezed his hand so gratefully when, having given the order to the postilion, Bernard took leave of her, that he, whose heart was exultant at the recovery of Lilian, had no leisure to bear malice. So Lucy Forester departed.

Brief time had Bernard now to greet Lilian, to exchange experiences, or to confide to her the secret which he had learned that morning; for he was summoned to be present at an interview which, at Lord Rookbury's desire, was to be held in the drawing-room, and which Molesworth had insisted on postponing, not much to the peer's satisfaction, until Carlyon should arrive. Lord Rookbury had not been apprised by Molesworth of the relations between himself and Bernard, and the delay, therefore, appeared to the Earl particularly unreasonable. But Stephen Molesworth, as a rule, seldom gave way, and never to valuable clients. It was late, therefore, when Mrs. Wilmslow, Molesworth, the Earl and Bernard met.

"And because it is so late, Mrs. Wilmslow," said Molesworth, "we will, if you please, proceed instantly to business, and confine ourselves, if we can, to business considerations only. Lord Rookbury and yourself are both clients of mine, and I have therefore thought it well that a third person should be present. Bernard, you will hear all that is said, but I think you had better not interfere unless specially requested to do so."

"Is that the way you insult a young statesman's discretion and delicacy?" said Lord Rookbury, laughing, but not entirely without mischief.

"He will not feel insulted at anything I say to him," replied Molesworth, quietly. "Now, my dear Mrs. Wilmslow, what I have to say is this. It is no news to you that our friend Lord Rookbury has long set his heart upon becoming the possessor of Aspen Court. With his characteristic frankness and fairness," continued Molesworth, giving the last words their full syllabic value, or even a trifle more, "he instructs me to make a proposal to you, for which I have in some measure prepared you to-night. Without going into calculations, because your decision will not rest upon the question of money, I will merely say that he offers a very handsome price, and one which, were money only in question, it would be foolish to refuse. It is, there-

fore, for you to decide whether you will entertain his proposal at all."

"I have only one thing to add," said Lord Rookbury, "and I add it; not, of course with the view of influencing Mrs. Wilmslow in any way, but as part of my original plan. Should Aspen Court become my property, it will be only too honoured by her remaining as its occupant, on any terms Molesworth may think equitable, until the end of a life which must long outlast mine, and which I trust will be for years afterwards the admiration of my son, as it has been mine."

"Lord Dawton, I know, is of his father's mind in this matter, Mrs. Wilmslow," added Molesworth.

"Nothing can be kinder than such an offer," said Jane; "but there is another person who has to be consulted—whatever painful circumstances may have separated us, it is impossible for me to decide upon such a question without ascertaining the will of my husband."

Both Molesworth and Lord Rookbury began to answer her at once, which was curious. The Earl, however, who was going to assure her that Henry Wilmslow would do whatever he ordered him to do, recollected that this was not quite the thing to say, and, checking himself, left the field to Molesworth.

"For argument's sake—or rather for the sake of business, Mrs. Wilmslow, we will suppose that Mr. Wilmslow will not interfere in any decision of yours."

"Before I answer, then," said Jane, "will you, Bernard, say anything to me? You are a very kind and a very true friend to me, I believe," she added, laying her hand upon his.

"He may be so," said Molesworth; "but I do not think that he can interfere with any advantage."

"I think, Molesworth," said the Earl, "that you are placing our young friend in a false position. For my own part, I submit that any counsel he can give should not be withheld from Mrs. Wilmslow, who I know, also, has almost a motherly regard for him, honourable to both."

"I *am* in a false position," said Bernard, "though not that from which Lord Rookbury is good enough to wish to relieve me. It is understood by one person present, perhaps by two. Still, if Mrs. Wilmslow again appeals to me, nothing shall prevent my giving her the best answer in my power."

"Is he to speak?" said Jane, with a little smile, as she addressed Molesworth.

"As he pleases," said Molesworth, slowly.

"Shall we sell Aspen Court, Bernard?"

"If Mr. Molesworth will sell it for you, sell, dear Mrs. Wilmslow."

"So!" ejaculated Molesworth.

"And why do you advise it, Bernard?" said Mrs. Wilmslow.

"For several reasons," replied Carlyon. "The interest of the large sum of money which the estate would fetch, would be a comfortable and certain income for you, and the principal would divide into handsome fortunes for—for those who would come after you"—he rather hurried over the words. "This is much better than an estate, the title to which it is not for me to dis-parage before a purchaser, beyond saying that it has complications which it might not, at need, be easy to unravel. If, therefore, Mr. Molesworth will sell Aspen Court for you, and invest the purchase-money in your name, I advise you to accept Lord Rookbury's proposal."

"The reply which I expected from Mr. Carlyon," said the Earl.

"Perhaps I did, also," murmured Molesworth.

"Still, without my husband's opinion to guide me, I cannot feel," said Jane, "that I ought even to give my own. Aspen Court is very dear to me; it was the harbour to which, during all the storms of my life, I looked forward as my resting-place; and though I deceived myself when I dared to hope that all my sorrows were over when we had regained our inheritance, and though a heavier grief than any I had known before has fallen upon me under this roof, I feel as if the old house had become dearer to me, and that the little church where my poor baby must—"

What light form glides silently into the room? Whose arms are upon Jane's neck? whose golden curls quiver upon her bosom, as the new comer, striving to speak, can only sob?

"Lilian!" exclaimed Bernard. "Ah! I guess your errand, dear one."

"God help me!" cried Mrs. Wilmslow, piteously, "for I dare not refuse to guess it too. My own Amy, my little, little Amy, is—"

"God's Amy now—His youngest angel," sobbed out Lilian, clinging to the bereaved mother.

"Gone! gone! and her mother not there to take a last kiss! O my Amy! my Amy!"

"It could not have been given, dear, dearest Mrs. Wilmslow," said Lilian, struggling earnestly against her own emotion, that she might offer such comfort as her tale could bestow. "You left her sleeping; she continued in that slumber until—it seems hours—it can have been but a few minutes ago. Her sisters were with me in the room, when the dear creature suddenly sat up in her bed, and quite laughed out. We thought she was in a dream, and we waited a moment, watching her. She looked at each of us for an instant, smiled, and said—

"I told the angel so. There are three of you to love mamma. He will give me his flowers."

"The next moment she fell back upon the pillow—we were by her side—but all was over. They *could* not come to you—they sent me. Oh! dear, dear Mrs. Wilmslow!" cried Lilian, passionately.

"Amy! O my little Amy!" moaned poor Jane. "And her father away, too!"

"Ha!" said Molesworth, who, with the Earl, had drawn away from the mother's sorrow. "It must be told, too—and yet—Bernard!"

Carlyon approached at the summons.

"There is more to tell her—what, in fact, is no bad news, could she think so—but whether to breathe it at this moment. I have letters which inform me that last week Henry Wilmslow, in an intoxicated orgy, involved himself in a brawl with some foreign gambler in Brussels, and being, I suppose, mad with drink, insisted on fighting. They used swords, and he was killed in the billiard-room where the strife arose; the witnesses say, slain fairly; but I suppose they were all gaming-house ruffians, and probably he was murdered."

"He *was* murdered," shrieked Jane, who had seen Molesworth summon Carlyon, and, prompted by a strange instinct, had drawn near and listened. "He was murdered, and I have done it! He was driven from England to die—and who caused him to be driven out? His wife."

To agonized spasm and convulsive sob succeeded insensibility, and she was removed to her chamber.

Molesworth was never a man of explanations, and when he did give them, it was reluctantly, and with as much reservation as he could manage. And he, moreover, had peculiar reasons of his own for being especially unwilling to make frank confidence in regard to certain matters of which we have heard. The deaths of Henry and of Amy, and the precarious condition in which Mrs. Wilmslow continued, long after the poor little girl had been laid to her rest in Aspen church, (in the place which she had so strangely chosen,) naturally postponed any confidential interview between himself and Jane. But Bernard, of course, hastened to obtain an answer to the question which he had started from his reverie in the woods to ask, and which, important as it was, he had contrived to forget amid the excitement of the pursuit after Lilian.

"You are my legitimate son, but you bear the name of a mother concerning whom her child should ask no question. Retain the name, for you have done much to redeem its hatefulness to me. Should it ever be necessary to prove your pedigree, the proofs shall be furnished. In the meantime, let the subject never be mentioned between us."

With this reply, Bernard Carlyon was compelled to content himself. He might have been more anxious about further explanations, but that he had other matters to occupy him. For, some months later than the last events we have described, and when Emma Wilmslow could lay aside mourning, for a day, to put on bridesmaid's attire, (Kate chose to remain in attendance on her mother,) he was married to Lilian Trevelyan. I am not fond of conversions, and I record it without the slightest Protestant triumph, that they were united by the Reverend Lord Dawton, who, to the preternatural rage of his father the Earl, had insisted upon taking holy orders, and had even threatened to go out as a missionary, if Lord Rookbury made himself disagreeable. But Francis Selwyn, whose staunch Protestantism caused him to be intensely delighted with Bernard for rescuing so beautiful a creature as Lilian from the errors of the old faith, determined that so meritorious an act should have due reward, and consequently he recommended Carlyon so vigorously for promotion, that he has already been sent up so high, that he is compelled to exert himself to the utmost to vindicate the recommendation of his friend. Lilian sometimes complains, very

gently, that he is never with her, but Lord Rookbury assures her that husbands were not intended to spend their time with their wives ; and there is certain other consolation on its way.

When, however, Mr. Molesworth and Jane Wilmslow did meet for a long and interesting discussion, he became far more frank than was his wont. The death of Henry may have appeared to him as the removal of a prohibition which had previously forbidden him to speak, and still more sternly forbidden Jane to hear. But unluckily there were no witnesses to that interview, and what passed between Molesworth and Mrs. Wilmslow was scarcely of that character which would naturally prompt either to make confidence on the subject to a third person. We can therefore only surmise, vaguely, that the hard man of the world confessed something touching an old and deep-rooted love of his own, conceived at a time when a hasty and interested second marriage had shut him out from hope. He may have sought to explain the baleful influences of passions which, uniting while conflicting, led him to desire that she whom he loved in vain should never link her destiny to one whom she herself could love, and may have pleaded that in his fierce and cruel selfishness he could better bear to see her the bride and victim of one whom he despised, and over whom he tyrannized, than the happy wife of a worthy husband. If Stephen Molesworth avowed all this, and urged the extenuating plea that he had in some sort watched over the life he had so direfully troubled—had saved Jane and her loved ones from extremest need, and had at last secured for them a rich inheritance, it needed all the exquisite goodness and beautiful resignation of that noble woman to strengthen her to listen. It may be that she has never fully forgiven him for her wedded life—assuredly, no human judge has a right to demand that she should extend such pardon. But while the residue of her days endures, he struggles to obliterate somewhat of the memory of the past by the utmost and most deferential service and friendship.

Lady of Aspen Court, with undisputed sovereignty—for what imaginary claim could be set up anew, on the part of the Trevellyans, it may easily be supposed that Bernard Carlyon's wife would scarcely raise, while Molesworth's mystic parchments, elaborately prepared to give him holds and vantage-grounds ultimately unneeded, were in due form rendered harmless—Jane

Wilmslow resides in her old house, and does good to every one who comes within her gentle influence. Deeply has she expiated the rashness of marrying a man "who had been a little too gay." The young heiresses, Emma and Kate, adore their mother too much to disregard what counsel she may give them on this head.

As regards Emma, I do not know whether she has had any offers; but she is young, beautiful, and amiable, and will be rich (for Molesworth has taken the Aspen estates in hand, in thorough earnest, and the property will be a noble one), so that she need not hurry herself. But as for Kate, if the Reverend Lord Dawton goes on gazing at those great brown eyes as he has done ever since Bernard's wedding, there is no saying that half of Aspen Court may not actually come into the Rookbury family, after all. And as good-for-nothing Earl Charles cannot vex better folks for ever, one of these days our little Kate may be Catherine, Countess of Rookbury, and then there will not be a prettier peeress.

But we have not quite done with the Earl, who, you know, has a daughter in genteel lodgings in Islington—a young lady who has deserved too well of several people, to be left there, improving her mind with great industry, and wishing that the process were out of fashion. To tell the truth, the Earl of Rookbury, after the novelty of the discovery was over, and when he began to consider what to do with poor Angela, did launch sundry execrations against the meddling Spanish dancer, who had the impertinence to recognise the Polish colonel—to obtain from Spain certain particulars as to the English lady who had years before carried away the objectionable child—to seek out that lady, and finally to procure such a clue to the paternity of the young actress, as enabled him to break into the house in Acheron Square with the news that sent Lord Rookbury into the pit of the suburban theatre. Indeed, he had reasons for being venomous against that dancer; for the man—a shrewd, smart fellow, by no means averse to mischief, and from a long course of study quite aware of the value of a well-handled secret—managed to extort most unrighteous hush-money for the safe keeping of the earlier part of the *historiette*. At last, and at a small expense, Lord Rookbury succeeded in sending off this nuisance to the Havannah, as *entrepreneur* on his own account;

and then his Lordship seriously reflected what he should do with his daughter, to whom he had really taken a sort of liking.

He consulted with Carlyon, whom, on the original discovery, he had charged with making explanations to Angela; and laying his difficulty frankly before Bernard, and dwelling pathetically upon the great cruelty of forcing a nobleman's mislaid children into his privacy, he asked Bernard's advice. A project for serving two persons whom he greatly liked instantly occurred to Carlyon, and he demanded *carte-blanche*, if he were to interfere at all. Obtaining this, he visited in succession Mr. Molesworth, Angela, and Paul Chequerbent, and the result was a humble application from Mr. and Mrs. P. Chequerbent, enclosing their marriage certificate (witnesses, Mrs. Sellenger, Mrs. Bong, the two old maids at Angy's lodgings, and Bernard Carlyon), and requesting forgiveness, and that the Earl of Rookbury would buy a small share in Molesworth's business for Paul, who had resolved to be a most industrious solicitor for the time to come. The Earl granted the pardon, but higgled over the partnership; but Paul's respectable relations, finding that he was going up in the world and could do without them, behaved so kindly and liberally, that, among the party, Paul was established in the firm, now Molesworth, Penkridge, & Chequerbent. Angela makes a very good wife, is learning to speak pityingly of "actresses and that sort of people," and will in a few years be as genteel as any of us.

Of a few only of the other people who have managed one way or another to connect themselves with our story, need mention be made again. Poor Eustace Trevelyan still lingers; but the abrupt withdrawal of Heywood, upon whom, as upon a pillar of strength, the broken man had leant, enfeebled and bewildered him more than ever, and he is now a pitiable spectacle of what is termed melancholy madness. In the quietude of Lily Nook, which Carlyon has managed to secure as a residence, and under the affectionate care of Lilian, the poor priest, who so sadly mistook his way in this world, will be gently tended, until that last trembling, erring footstep, after which all errors are over for ever.

Selwyn's political fortunes are doubtful. The proud, high-couraged man would do honour to any cause, but he is far from

popular. Like Halifax, he is almost more merciless to the faults of his colleagues than to those of his antagonists, and this the latter regard as want of good party feeling. And perhaps, too, he admits privately to himself, that he is not the best advocate of a popular demand (even when he knows it to be just), from a certain half-heartedness occasioned by the contempt in which he holds the "vain loud multitude," and its noisy idols. However, he has his trials. Mrs. Forester has carried her point, and married him, as any woman with courage and determination can do by any man in this country, and our handsome Lucy has both. He yielded, but it was with some reluctance, and on the whole transaction considers himself rather a victim. But he is a most tractable husband, and it is not impossible that some of the advantages theoretically imagined to arise from the matrimonial union may accrue to both of them. Lucy has renounced play for ever and ever, and Selwyn has been to the opera with her several times. Let us do her the justice to add, that she has more than once offered to fulfil her promise of presenting Lilian Carlyon; and if, by the time that lady's health shall have been lost and recovered in the way to which she is looking with delight, and Bernard with resignation, the approach to Her Gracious Majesty's footstool be rendered easy to ladies of ordinary physical strength, the beautiful bride of the rising young official will be chaperoned to Court by the magnificent wife of the veteran statesman.

THE END.



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